

“THE MOST ASTONISHING TRIUMPHS”:

**fresh Light on Primitive Methodist
History, Hagiography and Detraction
from northern Hampshire
1830-1852**

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for the degree of Master of Philosophy

by

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Abbreviations:

PMism	Primitive Methodism
PM	Primitive Methodist
(the) Magazine	<i>The Primitive Methodist Magazine</i>
Wesley	John Wesley (unless otherwise specified)
OLD	<i>Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland</i>
PMHB	<i>Large Hymn Book, for the Use of the Primitive Methodists</i>
UK	United Kingdom
WHS	Wesley Historical Society

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Parts of this research have been published by the following publishers:

- Tenda: Prishtina
- Friends of the Willis Museum (Basingstoke)
- Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society
- Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society
- *Evangelical Times*
- *The Ranter's Digest*

Accepted, yet to appear: European Pentecostal Theological Association
 Wesley Historical Society

Websites:

- *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/links.html)
- myprimitivemethodists.org.uk (Methodist Heritage)

1 Wesleyan Methodist

ABSTRACT

This thesis contributes both new historical research and revised perception of early PMism. It is set against the absence of any historical account of the coming of Methodism to northern Hampshire. Its aim and method are twofold: to research the events, personalities, beliefs, experience and ethos; and by comparing these findings with popular and academic eulogy and obloquy of PMs to correct them where they do not match the primary sources.

This is not primarily an institutional or statistical study of the Connexion, nor of its national leadership, but is a local study of pioneers and ordinary believers and the extent to which they conform to what might be deemed hagiography or detraction. Having researched the history of the movement, and ascertained that it is homogeneous with the nationwide movement, the thesis argues that much literature, popular and scholarly, has given misleading depictions of the inner world of the movement. Some writers take their admiration too far, or construct a falsely admiring image of PMs in accord with their own priorities. This thesis looks honestly at phenomena omitted in such hagiography. Other writers, misinterpreting the phenomena or motivation, disapprove of certain aspects of the movement.

Although the material studied is akin to that used by other scholars, the dissertation aims to contribute a different strand to academic study of the movement, applying its methodology both to a different geographical area, and to the Methodists' subjectivity, seeking thereby to add a component missing from other writings.

It first reviews secondary writing which impinges upon the inquiries. The methodology is then explained, including the use of primary sources, and justifying the dissertation's chronological and geographical parameters.

After a summary of the social and religious situation in Hampshire, and an overview of the wider PM movement, there is an account of its spread and ethos in northern Hampshire and of the early stages of transition from the period of rapid expansion to a calmer *modus operandi*.

In the ensuing critical discussion, the ethos of the movement, and the characters of its pioneers and members, are compared with admiring and derogatory depictions, both academic and popular, of Methodists from Victorian to modern times, which portray them as resplendent heroes, enlightened forerunners of feminism, or noble working-class political activists, or as obsessed with hell and judgement, hysterically emotional, clinging to survivals from superstitious folk religion, and gloomily repressive. This dissertation aims to demonstrate that the first generation of PMs in the four circuits of northern Hampshire do not wholly match those depictions, and, by correcting facts or perceptions, to construct a more rounded and faithful portrayal of the life-world, characters and achievements of the preachers and members.

(99,616 words)

INTRODUCTION

Much help with research was received at the County Record Offices and libraries mentioned in the Methodology, Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Museum, and the Willis Museum, Basingstoke. Writers of previous theses have been unstinting in their advice: Hatcher by many patient and informative emails; Calder and Vickers by receiving me into their homes and by correspondence; Dews by giving me unlimited access to his extensive private library on Methodism. Others cited in the text who have freely given advice and information, and have received me into their homes, are Dr Alison Deveson and Rev. David Sharp. Professor Royle offered a range of suggestions and information.

I record the possibly unintentional planting of an early seed by my father, Dinsdale Thomas Young (1903-1997), who bought Ritson's *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* for me at a jumble sale in Basingstoke, probably in 1964, thereby igniting my ardour for PMism. The title is derived from it (page 127): "Some of the most astonishing triumphs were won by the pioneers among the agricultural labourers in the south of England."

This study attempts to discover and discuss:

- the characters and ministries of the *main players* in the drama
- the course of the *events*
- the *beliefs and ethos* of the movement
- its *critique* in popular and academic reflection.

It gestated as follows:

- First came the desire to read about early Methodism in the selected geographical area and the discovery that nothing has been published beyond scattered fragments.
- Second came the archival research, to discover the history: no *a priori* hypothesis was entertained, rather the approach was grounded, during which an impression of the movement gradually formed and salient themes were identified.
- Third was the reading of secondary literature, during which an impression was gained both of their major themes, and of what theories were postulated concerning those themes.

- Fourth, the hypothesis developed that a number of portrayals of the movement are erroneous or incomplete.

These stages proceeded to some extent concurrently; nonetheless, that was their logical and in large measure also chronological order.

The thesis contributes the first attempt at a sustained narrative of the penetration of PMism into northern Hampshire. In contrast to most other writing in the field, it also contributes to knowledge by means of an emic approach, seeking to perceive and appreciate from within the ethos and inner world of the movement. Its findings and conclusions are relevant to religious, social and local historiography, both by the recording of events and in the understanding and appreciation of them and participants in them.

CHAPTER 1:

LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of primary sources is found in Methodology. This chapter deals with the secondary literature which sheds light on the matter of this thesis. It looks first at articles and books, then at academic theses. The dissertation enters into dialogue with the existing body of literature, in order to show how research from primary sources connects with, modifies, supports and supplements the findings of previous writers.

Historiography of the national movement falls into two main phases. The first includes the work of contemporary participants and later PM writers who wished to celebrate the lives of the early pioneers, and ends (apart from minor works) with Ritson (1911). The second phase includes PM and other writers who have studied the movement's history, its place within the wider religious context, or its impact on different aspects of national life. There is a tendency for the second phase to focus on the early movement, or on external matters such as statistics, demography, architecture, or institutional organisation.

A survey of historiographical development of complete histories of PMism reveals Petty, Kendall, Ritson, Barber, Lysons, Milburn, ranging from Petty's first edition (1860) to Milburn (2002). All are written by Methodists. The first three write with admiration and identify themselves with the character of the movement of the period in this study; the last three also write with admiration and record the same beliefs and phenomena, but distance themselves from some of those features.

After Ritson (1911), writings largely move through admiration for a bygone form of religion to undisguised animosity. One of the gaps this thesis seeks to fill is a return to a sympathetic appreciation of the movement, coupled with acknowledging and assessing its less winsome aspects, blemishes and failings, modifying some of the eulogy, and correcting misunderstandings which lie behind the hostility.

Not without some exceptions, Methodist writers drift increasingly away from the ethos and emphases of PMism, perhaps with John Kent at the end of the spectrum. Dissociation from primitive Methodism is sometimes manifested in small, subtle ways, such as the habit (e.g. Davies (1963),

Davies, George & Rupp (Eds.) (1978), Kent (1978)) of enclosing the words *converted* or *conversion* in inverted commas, seeming to imply that the regeneration experienced by early Methodists may be considered spurious.

Davies (1963:102) discussing the theology of the 18th century revival comments:

Once we are saved in this way, we can know that we are saved. And here we enter the highly debatable territory of Wesley's doctrine of 'assurance'. ...

No great imagination is required to see the abuses to which such a doctrine could and did lead. It struck (as it still strikes) respectable Christians as revolting that any man who might have been a drunkard or a thief until the previous week should be encouraged to claim that the Holy Spirit had told him that he was saved.

As will be demonstrated, the PMs did not consider such an event “revolting”, but rather wondered at the grace and magnitude of God’s goodness towards broken men and women. Davies continues to distance himself from primitive Methodism on pages 184-5 concerning post-war developments, when Methodist preachers were (he asserts) “becoming gradually conscious of the inadequacy of traditional evangelical theology, with its rigid plan of salvation and its literal adherence to the text of the Bible.”

Kent (1978:62-3) treats the lovefeast with scorn: “in a love-feast ... those present were able to talk about themselves, ‘testifying’, as they put it, which meant that they described, with reference to their own lives, experiences of guilt and forgiveness which others could then imitate.” Wesley’s theology is “obsessive”. He ascribes some of the Methodists’ response to preaching to “dissociative behaviour”, as will be discussed in Chapter 6B.

Dickinson (2012:322), a Methodist minister, states that Methodism should now ensure it becomes “a church joyfully embracing diversity” which “must realign how it stands in relation to its tradition”. Such words would have struck a discordant note in Hampshire during the decades of this study.

Bebbington (2012:107) shows:

The best-known analysis of Victorian revivalism in Britain, Holding the Fort (1978), was written by a Methodist minister, John Kent, who described the lively style adopted by the Primitive Methodists as a form of ‘euphoria’ imported from America and similar to modern pop festivals. Of the two volumes of the official British denominational history covering the

nineteenth century, published in 1978 and 1983, one ignored revivalism altogether and the other merely referred to its existence in passing. It was as though the subject was too embarrassing for consideration.

Most novelists who introduce Methodists use them as a type for crabbed, censorious hypocrisy, gloom, and obsolescence, though a minority write with warmth and affection.

This thesis argues that much literature hostile to PMism rightly perceives external phenomena but fails to understand their place in the inner world of the PMs, whilst the movement's admirers have sometimes downplayed or concealed its less winsome features. It aims to correct erroneous or incomplete generalisations by contributing a different component, namely the exploration and appreciation of the movement's inner world. This is attempted through a thorough critical engagement with both hostile and adulatory writers in the light of research in primary sources.

ARTICLES AND BOOKS

Methodism

Many writers identify sociological factors, but tend to overlook the spiritual and experiential dimension of which an understanding is necessary for an emic study of the movement, a gap which this thesis seeks to fill. Theories regarding political, economic and social circumstances which contributed to PM success are found in Hobsbawm (1959), Currie (1967), Thompson (1968) and Everitt (1972). They are not central to the argument of this thesis as it searches for the events and ethos in Hampshire and assesses whether they conform to admiring or disapproving portrayals, and therefore, though summarised, play little part in the main discussion.

Pocock 1885

Pocock (including Rigg's Introduction) shows how the early Wesleyans largely overlooked agricultural regions of England, and records their sparse representation in rural Hampshire. This, together with Stamp (see Methodology) has immeasurable relevance for the background section of this study.

Wearmouth 1937

Wearmouth's study of working class movements in the first half of the nineteenth century states (page 7) that the PMs were "comprised mostly of the poorer portions of the community" and (page 167) "can be described as a working-class association." He notes that five Methodists (including three local preachers) were sentenced to transportation for involvement with the Tolpuddle martyrs, and that other Methodists were involved but not imprisoned. Pages 184-90 supply a list of PMs who were involved in radical movements among miners of the North-East in the 1830s and 1840s, but he states that "no Trade Union movement was organized during the first half of the nineteenth century" among agricultural labourers (page 212). He comments further (pages 214-6) that the influence of Methodism "on the agrarian movements in general and on the Agricultural Unions in particular is very difficult to define," adding that it is impossible to assess how many Methodists took part in the agrarian movements, as no evidence appeared to be available. This all has a forceful bearing on Chapter 7D, which demonstrates that some writers, reconstructing the story of PMism, have misled their readers into thinking that PMs were involved in radical political activity from the first. This is further supported by a second volume, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1954:185-207) which supplies many names of PMs involved in agricultural agitation, starting from 1872.

Currie 1967

Currie drew his statistics from the 1851 religious census and from Anglican and Wesleyan data for 1801. He argues that the Wesleyans grew best in the eighteenth century in places where the Church of England was weak in out-townships and extensive, straggling parishes, and in places where the clergy were non-resident or pluralist, and where as a result there was less persecution. Wesleyan strength was greater north of a line from the Severn to the Wash. Currie also contends that the Old Dissent was strong where the Church of England was strong, south of the Severn-Wash line, because it drew its members directly out of that Church.

He contends that, to some extent, PMs filled the gaps left by the Church of England and the Wesleyans, where Wesleyans failed to adapt to post-Waterloo or industrial conditions. The new Methodist denominations extended the appeal of Methodism to new social groups and new

geographical areas.

He fails however to define “weak”. Does he mean numerically? financially? spiritually? Does he have in mind doctrinal fidelity or provision of suitable accommodation for worship? Regarding Hampshire and “the gaps left by the Wesleyans”, the Wesleyans were sparsely distributed in the villages prior to the advent of PMism, which renders much of Currie’s argument less relevant to this thesis. Everitt (1972) argues that the county is not a good unit on which to base comparisons between parishes because different areas of the same county differ in character. He hesitates to accept Currie’s generalisations as far as rural areas are concerned.

Turner 1985

This is “an exhaustive study of Methodism and its relationship with other Confessions from Wesley’s time up to ... 1982”. Chapter 5 includes the PMs and Chapter 7 politics. It asserts that PM itinerant preachers “were near their proletarian roots and remained comparatively poorly paid” (page 59) and sees PMism as “in some ways a revivalistic form of Quakerism” (page 83). The book ascribes PM success to economic hardship, enclosures, tithes and the unpopularity of the Anglican clergy. Concerning the period after 1840 it sees PMs as “begging for villagers’ pence rather than their souls” and refers to chapel debts. Together with “much persecution” in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire “by squire and parson who equated ranters² with rickburners” (page 85), these themes are prominent motifs in the research and analysis of this thesis.

Hempton 2005

For the purposes of this thesis, Hempton is informative on periodisation with regard to growth and decline, and change of ethos and *modus operandi*. Among the reasons for the decline in Methodism he sees the need for the third and fourth generations to build an infrastructure; moral and spiritual failures; mistaken policies; the decline of itinerancy and of class and camp meetings; the enervating influence of liberal theology; chapel debts; a depersonalised social gospel; and accommodation to the surrounding culture. He adds historical forces: the growth of voluntary association, making choice of religious affiliation similar to the developing free market economy and to democratisation;

² The word *Ranter* applied first to a mid-seventeenth century sect, and came to be applied to the PMs initially in Belper in 1816.

industrialisation; urbanisation; and secularisation. Methodism had been better adapted to earlier situations. Much of this takes him a good way beyond the period of this study, but there are also resonances with 1830-52, as will be noted especially in Chapters 3B, 4B and 7D.

Hempton's aim is to account for the rise of Methodism as a transnational movement from the 1730s till about 1890, and "to penetrate the heart of something both elusive and important." This he does in eight chapters, including one devoted to Methodism's message and how it was communicated and experienced. This is one of the few attempts to get beyond external factors into the inner ethos of Methodism. Hempton observes that most conversions happened in people's teens, often in communities experiencing rapid change, and were frequently accompanied with deep psychological distress, fear of death and previous religious knowledge. Conversion is followed by the pursuit of sanctification, and finally by holy dying. Methodism involved much self-examination, discipline, fear of backsliding and of worldliness, together with support via class and camp meetings, lovefeasts, prayer meetings and sermons. He sets before his readers various explanations that have been offered for these experiences: lack of customary social standards, psycho-sexual repression, economic dislocation, religious fervour.

Watts (1995:305) says Hempton "writes as though Methodism and Wesleyanism were synonymous." Many of his examples and themes are taken from the eighteenth century, and many are from America, which reduces but does not cancel its relevance to this study of nineteenth century Hampshire.

Aspects of Methodism

Norman P. Goldhawk in Davies, George and Rupp (Eds.) (1978:113) writes that "it can be claimed that Methodist spirituality consisted of certain well-defined characteristics" which continued in varying degrees during the first half of the nineteenth century. Goldhawk identifies these as "a strong personal urge towards holiness, and evangelistic missionary impulse, and adherence to a distinctive church order and discipline." He supplies analyses of various characteristics, especially doctrine, the means of grace, class meetings, lovefeasts and prayer meetings. These contribute in this thesis to the overview of distinguishing characteristics of Methodism, especially as experienced in PMism. Concerning theological change, he explains why it did not affect PMism in the period of this study: "Until after 1850 theology, like biblical research, was almost entirely an Anglican affair."

Other writers supplied information concerning particular aspects of this dissertation: Yates (1952) on the doctrine of assurance; Sangster (1943) and Wesley (1777) on entire sanctification; Edwards (1935) (who deals mainly with Wesleyans in the earlier part of the period 1791-1849) on sartorial regulations; Royle (2010) on the ‘temperance’ movement; Knight (2012) on village preaching in the Victorian era, for the discussion of Methodist emphasis on Hell in Chapter 6C.

Moore 1974, Howkins 1985, Cracknell 1998, Knighton 2003, Clough 2004

Moore’s study of “the effects of Methodism in a Durham mining community” (its subtitle) concerns the years 1870-1926, and does not focus on the region, period, or type of community studied in this thesis. However, his general comments on the relationship between Methodism and politics are cited in confirmation of the argument concerning whether early PMism was politically active. Howkins, Cracknell, Knighton and Clough are all cited only in the same discussion (Chapter 7D).

Valenze 1985

Valenze’s study concerns the rôle of women in cottage religion in England during the Industrial Revolution, which largely means Methodism, and especially PMism. Referring to Hugh Bourne’s writings on the use of women preachers, she observes that he claims that women can avoid scriptural prohibitions on women speaking in church if they preach as evangelists in cottages. Valenze traces strong links between cottage religion, the centrality of the home, and domesticity, and sees cottage religion as a product of rural culture and domestic industries (such as lace-making) which grew in importance in the harsh years following the Napoleonic wars. “The small farmhouse was the mainstay of Primitive Methodism in the Southwest. ... the domestic base of rural sectarianism” (pages 111-2). She argues that, with poverty, dispersal of families, migration, dislocation and distress, home-based religion grew in significance, giving a sense of community. It strengthened and preserved the household, and gave status to women and to their rôle in the home.

Carwardine 2006

Carwardine writes at length about the transition from revival to revivalism, drawing attention especially to American influence, and the introduction of American means to promote revival. He

concludes that by the 1850s most churches had adopted a revivalism in which the effects were worked up rather than prayed down. The approach can be traced largely to the influence of James Caughey and Charles Finney. This receives close attention in Chapter 4B below.

Methodism in Hampshire

Deveson 2012

Deveson, whose doctorate is in medieval local history, focuses largely on the Wesleyans. She felt it necessary to write her book in a style for popular consumption, but behind it lies a hinterland of the meticulous research of a scholarly historian. It covers the first two centuries of Methodism in Whitchurch.

Others

Paintin's various booklets speak about individual Wesleyan societies; Pillow (1985) about Winchester; Booker (1990) about Newbury. In the main these works, together with Deveson, are historical and descriptive rather than analytical, but they provide both a background context and pointers for primary research.

Methodism in Fiction

Novels are one source of stereotypes by which Methodists are depicted as lacking in joy themselves and kill-joys in their relations with others. Research for this thesis discovered examples up till 2012, but the methodological decision was taken to cite only novelists who might have had first-hand experience of early PMism. This thesis concedes and demonstrates that PM legalism gave significant justification for this antipathy, though it is an incomplete picture. Cunningham (1975) gives 300 pages on the gloomy, censorious picture of Nonconformists in nineteenth century novels. Dickinson (2012), though studying the twentieth century, writes, "most nineteenth-century novels dismissed Methodism as a distasteful or hypocritical sect" (page 310). Cunningham writes (pages 9-10): "The Dissenter suffers in Victorian fiction from extensive illiberality at the hands of the novelists who, however, introduce him on such an ample, indeed liberal, scale into their novels."

Davies (1963:50) confirms Cunningham's findings: "Novelists, essayists, and Anglican church historians (of an earlier generation) do not, for the most part, give a favourable account of them [late 19th century Methodists]. They appear as smug, narrow-minded, often hypocritical, opposed to other people's pleasures and incapable of having any of their own except hymn-singing."

The trend to denigrate Methodism is not without exception. George Borrow speaks warmly, almost wistfully, of the PMs in *Lavengro*, written 1842-50. As Cunningham (1975:145) points out, George Eliot knew about PMism first-hand from her uncle Samuel Evans and his wife, who associated with the PMs following the Wesleyan ban in 1803 on female preachers.

PMism

Histories of Victorian Nonconformity tend to say little about the PMs, though they describe the religious historical background, and thus provide the context for this dissertation.

Petty 1880

Of the four main histories of PMism, this thesis leans most heavily on Petty (1880, third edition) in its quest to penetrate the inner ethos of the movement. He was contemporary (1807-68) with the period, was accredited to the general missionary committee in 1826, and took part with John Ride's wife in revival meetings. He was a colleague of Ride when the latter was superintendent of the Brinkworth Circuit, and preached at the opening of Brinkworth chapel in 1828³. In 1829 he spent three weeks with Ride in Berkshire, paving the way for the opening of the Berkshire mission⁴. He ministered in the Reading, Andover and Newbury Circuits in the period under discussion. Moreover, his intention closely suits the purposes of this dissertation:

The writer can conscientiously affirm that he has laboured to avoid all colouring or exaggeration, and to present the naked truth before his readers.

The work is neither controversial, nor apologetic. The Author has anxiously guarded against feeding denominational pride and vanity ... by recording examples worthy of imitation, and narrating evils and failures as an admonition to increased vigilance and caution; and has

3 Magazine (1829:287)

4 Russell (1886:148)

been wishful to furnish such information and present such facts as would enable intelligent readers of other denominations to form their own unbiassed judgment of the community whose history he has written.

Petty began writing in 1856 and covers the period till 1860; a brief Supplement was added for the 1880 edition. Although he conveys the spirit and ardour of PMism more affectively and effectively than later writers, he leans somewhat towards hagiography and seems to overlook or at least to downplay the less attractive or praiseworthy features of the movement: the shortcomings, failures, and sins which beset the work.

Kendall ca 1908

Kendall (1844-1919) carries the history forward till the early 20th century. His work is undated, having been issued in a series of 14 pamphlets around 1908, for the denomination's extended centenary celebrations 1907-11. His smaller work, *What God hath wrought!*, published around 1907, traces times of expansion and decline till 1833, when the Brinkworth District of the denomination was formed, then of renewed revival and growth, followed by a period of transition which he dates as 1842-53, during which period Hugh Bourne threw himself into the teetotal movement, and John Flesher became the most influential figure in PMism. He identifies 1853-85 as the period when PMism became dominated by districts rather than circuits, which supports the decision to make 1852 the terminus of this study.

Tonks 1907, Ritson 1911

Tonks (1867-1930) has the subtitle *The History of the Brinkworth Circuit*. He chronicles the period 1824-1907, with many subsections on individual Wiltshire villages. As this is the circuit from which the first missionaries went into Berkshire and thence to Hampshire, it is indispensable as an entry into the spirit of the initial movement studied in this thesis.

Ritson (1852-1932) deals largely with other parts of the country, but makes it his stated aim to convey the 'romance' of the movement. He supplies the image which PMs had of their first generation at about the time of their centenary, and (with its veracity established and in part

modified from primary sources concerning Hampshire) provided a helpful pointer to the discovery of the ethos of those years.

Barber 1932

Barber scarcely mentions the south, but confirms the chronological evolution of the wider movement. He writes admiringly of the early days, though he is not wholly in sympathy with their beliefs, for he writes glowingly of Arthur S. Peake as a model tutor, great interpreter, and spiritual genius. Peake (1865-1929) exercised paramount influence in changing the theology and emphases of the connexion.

Farndale 1950

This is a synopsis of the 1950 WHS Lecture and is subtitled “A New Appraisal of Primitive Methodist Origins”. Surveying the early movement, the lecture concludes that the “Secret of Mow Cop” and of the subsequent success of the movement was corporate prayer offered in faith. This resonates closely with an aspect of this thesis, namely belief in, and prayer to, a God who intervenes on behalf of his people as an essential element in the ethos of the movement.

Nuttall 1967

Nuttall has a chapter (XX:204-213) on the influence of Quakers on PMism, including via Hugh Bourne’s personal reading in Quaker literature. He shows that such characteristics as open-air preaching and praying, plainness of personal appearance, and the keeping of journals by the travelling preachers could all be seen as derived from Quakerism.

Obelkevich 1976

Obelkevich has 39 pages on Primitive Methodism 1825-75 in South Lindsey, an area comparable for its agricultural character with Hampshire. He deals with periodisation in the stages of the movement, PM organisation, comparison of travelling ministers and local preachers, kinds of

meetings, the emotional character of services, social base, self- and church-discipline, and the inner religious life of the members including the aspiration to entire sanctification. It is difficult to correlate his periodisation with events in Hampshire in a period of less than half the length, but where his study overlaps chronologically with this dissertation, there is close coincidence. In general he confirms the findings of other scholars, his original contribution being geographical rather than the character of PMism. His findings confirm that Hampshire shared common characteristics with PMism elsewhere.

His assessment of the stages of development (pages 248ff) depicts PMism as passing through a first aggressive, expansionist stage (1820-40), to a second, revivalist stage, in which there are existing congregations, who may be lukewarm and declining, whilst the preachers are “confident that revival could break out simply by virtue of their own will-power and prayer-power”: the members needed to be rekindled, the focus had become the PM families and chapel, there was less expansion (1840-60). These stages will be exemplified in Chapter 4B.

Obelkevich writes at length about areas of belief common to both folk religion and PMism, and explains that there was a growing divergence between élite and popular culture from the 17th century, as the world-view of educated classes became mechanistic and desacralised, so that by the 19th century little common ground remained with village populations. Anglican clergy offered no deliverance from the thrall of paganism; Methodists understood and ministered in that area. These insights are discussed in Chapter 6A.

Kent 1978

Kent has a chapter on American influence on PMism. He writes about the ethos and beliefs of the PMs with manifest distaste, and is at pains to distance himself from the movement. He deals with Lorenzo Dow’s visit to England in 1807 and the early PMs, and then leaps forward to 1859, seldom touching ground in between. He does assert (page 70) that American influence “had exhausted itself in Primitive Methodism” by 1850, which is at variance with other scholarship.

Werner 1984

In Werner (page xiii) “the early history of the Primitive Methodist movement is interpreted in the context of contemporary secular phenomena rather than told from a sectarian point of view”. The

book is described by Vickers in an email of 22nd May 2013 as “easily the best book on the subject in recent years”. Its approach is etic, whereas this thesis takes an emic approach, and the contrast suggested an enlightening counterfoil for the analytical sections of this thesis. This contrast is exemplified by Werner’s statement on page 152 that, “For several reasons it is impossible to know exactly what prompted these men and women to be convinced of sin, to ‘get liberty’, or to be certain of sanctification.” The PMs had no hesitation in ascribing such experiences to the Spirit of God. However, as Chapters 1-2 deal with the earlier Wesleyan background, and Chapters 3-5 with the birth of PMism and its expansion as far as the Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire, this leaves only the final chapter, on “what being a Primitive Methodist signified for the first generation of members”, as directly relevant for this study, and even then, the first generation in Hampshire (1830ff) was a good deal later than the first in Staffordshire (1807ff).

The book covers the approximate period 1791-1823. Nonetheless, some of her conclusions and insights receive comment in these pages. One (pages 173-4), which contradicts Thompson’s theory of a “chiliasm of despair”, is that “political aspirations did not have to be stymied before Ranter revivals could flourish”, and “people did not consistently turn to Primitive Methodism in the immediate aftermath of an abortive rising or when the government instituted repressive measures.” That is to say, the failure of political agitation and aspiration was not a regular cause of PM growth.

Ambler 1989

Based on Ambler’s doctoral thesis, this describes PMism in south Lincolnshire 1817-75. It supports conclusions regarding northern Hampshire, as south Lincolnshire was largely rural and agricultural. The portrayal of PMism shows it to have been of a very similar character to that of Hampshire. Sadly, many of his examples are drawn from the late 1850s to the 1870s, reducing but not negating its value as a comparison with Hampshire 1830-52. His comments on folk religion made a significant contribution and prompted the search for confirming examples in Hampshire. In words which closely parallel the findings of this study, Ambler explains on pages 51ff.:

Individuals who followed their way of life and gained salvation were provided with a basis for life in the new social order which was developing in south Lincolnshire. Their souls were saved in a dramatic clash between the forces of good and evil in which they assumed a supreme importance as they sought to triumph over Satan. This struggle was carried on within

a framework of language and imagery which was meaningful to them and it was the ability of the Primitive Methodists to link their teachings to popular beliefs which cemented their relationship with the working classes.

Lysons 2001

Lyson's book is divided into two parts, the first outlining the history of the denomination till 1932, the second focusing on the Lowton (Lancashire) Circuit in the years 1923-32. Lysons betrays his belonging to a later mutation of Methodism, and, whilst admiring the early heroic days, is not entirely in sympathy with them. For example, he writes (page 163): "I recognised the truth of Tennyson's lines:

*There lives more faith in honest doubt
Believe me, than in half the Creeds."*

He says of theology that "on many of the issues raised, we must adopt an attitude of reverent agnosticism." Lysons is a Methodist writer who approved of the changes that followed the period of this study: "The Bible was the authority for faith. ... Few knew anything of the enlightened critical approach to the Bible given by A. S. Peake ... Most were content with a Peter Pan religion that never grew up."

The last sentence reveals his personal *Weltanschauung*, which colours his historiography. This provides a counterpoint to voices heard in this study, for sources not wholly sympathetic to the Methodism of the period offer an inbuilt critical perspective.

Milburn 2002

This is part of a popular series and claims to tell "the story of the emergence of Primitive Methodism, its evolution over a century and more, its character and emphases, the kinds of people who committed themselves to it." Pages 1-30 chronicle the emergence and growth of the movement till about 1820, followed by an excursus on female preachers. The next chapter is entitled "A Mid-Century Survey", and focuses on 1851. Alongside population growth, PMism's "charismatic enthusiasm" and "fervour and conversionist activity" are adduced to account for the remarkable numerical and geographical growth, and attention is drawn to Quaker influence. There is a brief

explanation of circuits and districts as bases for ministry, and a description of early chapels and meetings. This is followed by a chapters largely about Petty and his *History*, overseas missions, schools, ministerial training, and the period up to 1932: much of this is beyond the parameters of this study.

The chapter on Social Influence confirms the findings of other writers, that political activism by PMs occurred early in the mining areas of the North-East, and among agricultural communities from 1872. PM businessmen, the teetotal movement and home missions are briefly surveyed, followed by a chapter on hymns.

Once more the phenomenon is notable of a Methodist writer admiring early PM achievements but distancing himself from their tenets, for on Peake he writes (page 75): “Peake’s influence and achievements dominated not only the religious outlook of his fellow Primitive Methodists but also of thinking people in all the churches.” The implied slur that people who disagree with Peake are unthinking must be registered.

Tiller 2006

Tiller’s long article on the interaction between PMism and the people of Oxfordshire is highly relevant, as it includes the same period as this study, deals with an area close to the Hampshire circuits of a similarly rural character, and makes reference to a number of the same leaders (Russell, Ride, Wallis). Indeed, the Faringdon and Wallingford missions grew, in 1832 and 1833, out of the same Shefford Circuit as initiated the Mitcheldever, Andover and Reading circuits.

PMs arrived in 1824; the timing and degree of progress varied considerably from place to place, with vulnerability and discontinuity, reasons for which are explored in terms of social and economic change, personal religion, and local circumstances, with studies of:

- chronology of success, failure, organisation
- numbers, location, settlement type, social class, chapel building, opposition
- transition from early growth, through consolidation, to placid denomination.

At first success and violent rebuff were typical, including opposition from Anglican clergy. PMism was seen as threat, in conflict with established authorities who tried to use the levers of power against it, and also in conflict with the pattern of working class life, requiring discipline, reform of manners, temperance. It was seen as a counter-culture, and a challenge to the Church of England,

appealing to people who were energetic, non-deferential and self-reliant. Their arrival followed the Swing riots, enclosure disturbances, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and its workhouses.

PMism was never strong in Oxford, other localities differed from ready response to outright rejection. PMism was overwhelmingly rural, with only 24% of their attendance in towns. In the background were harsh conditions and the decline of traditional rural culture. Baptismal registers show that, with the exception of Oxford, the majority of Oxfordshire PMs were labourers. The London road coaching trade was in decline, and the community was under stress. People were inclined to turn from politics to the prospect of a better world. The 1840s brought a flurry of chapel-building, evidence of the impact of PMism, involving an enormous challenge for overwhelmingly working class worshippers. The problem of chapel debt is mentioned but not explored further.

Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans sprang to the support of PMs showing that they were part of a wider Nonconformist community from outset. In 1851 the Wesleyans were the strongest Nonconformist body in Oxfordshire, whilst PMs were similar in strength to Baptists and Congregationalists. PMism did not follow Wesleyans by appearing where Wesleyans were or had been: many PMs were in places where Wesleyans were absent; they became established in different sorts of place. Wesleyans were weakest where the Old Dissent was strong, PMism where Dissent was stronger. Tiller's case studies show variety rather than a ubiquitous pattern of PM development, weakening the credibility of Currie's (1967), Thompson's (1968) and Everitt's (1972) theories of growth or failure.

Price 2012

Dave Price's *Turning the world upside down: learning from the Primitive Methodist movement* (Charleston, SC, USA: privately printed) is a 141-page summary of PM history down to 1932, including Australia and New Zealand, written in popular style and sympathetic towards the ethos and aims of the early movement. It is not cited in this thesis, but can be recommended as an easy introduction to the beliefs, inner life and evolution of the denomination.

Periodisation of PMism

Davies, George and Rupp (1978) felt that the appropriate dates to cover in Volume 2 were 1791-1849. The *New History of Methodism* (1909) suggests that PMism entered a period of transition in

1843, following the superannuation of Bourne and Clowes and the removal of central management from Bemersley, a hamlet in the Potteries, to London. Proposals for the reorganisation of the General Missionary⁵ Committee were adopted by the 1843 Conference, and the period during which the individual circuits had led the denomination's outreach gradually gave way to centralisation. The *History* suggests that by 1853 an era of consolidation had begun, transforming the movement into "a Connexion of confederated districts". Lysons (2001) records that the 1849 Conference Address reported that the Connexion was rising in wealth and numbers, and adds on page 82 that by 1860 evangelism shifted from outsiders to insiders, and from adults to children. He sees changes coming over the movement between 1843 and 1857. Barber (1932) sees the changes as beginning after the superannuation of Bourne and Clowes. Kent⁶ (1978) writes that 1810-1850 was the chief period of growth, while Barber⁷ relates that John Flesher became "foremost among the new leaders" after the superannuation of Bourne and Clowes with "pre-eminence both as a preacher and an administrator." It was in 1852 that Flesher retired, following which came "the 'District Period', 1853-85." Minor (1982:143) records: "The phenomena of enthusiasm were consistently reported from the beginning until the 1850s, when they began to be replaced by decorum, respectability, and 'worship.'" The new PM hymnbook, edited in 1853, "was certainly a move from a revivalist to a more broadly based hymnody"⁸. Milburn (2002) dates the PMs' "middle period" as 1850-90. Obelkevich's periodisation has already been outlined. Garratt (2002:288) comments that "during the second half of the nineteenth century Primitive Methodism evolved from a sect into an established and distinct denomination."

This weight of broadly consistent comment, combined with 1851 as the year of Britain's only religious census (providing invaluable data on the religious state of Methodism as well as religion in society as a whole) pointed to 1852 as an appropriate terminus for this thesis.

PMism in Hampshire

The most comprehensive surveys of progress beyond the point when PMism entered northern Hampshire are Sharp's writings (1990-2007). He concentrates on PMism in the Winchester and Andover areas, in approximately the same period as this thesis. His major work is *Cobbett*

⁵ The word missionary in the narrative refers to evangelism in England.

⁶ in Davies, George & Rupp (Eds.) (1978:267)

⁷ Harrison, Barber, Hornby, Davies (1932:114-7)

⁸ Turner (1985:62)

counfounded? (1990). He draws heavily on material in city and county record offices and libraries, the Magazine, and such writers as Thomas Russell, Petty, and Vickers. *The Primitive Methodist Mission in Rural Hampshire* (2000) largely repeats the material of 1990. His published 2007 lecture *Not well understood* is about Winchester PMism 1837-1932 and draws the following conclusions:

The primary motive behind the rise of Primitive Methodism was a deep concern that these ignorant and indifferent people should come to experience the salvation offered by God in Jesus Christ. ... Coupled to this was the priority of prayer. We tend to think of camp meetings as places for preaching; for Hugh Bourne and his colleagues, the praying companies were as important, if not more so, than the preachers. Likewise, the prayer meeting was an essential part of the life of the early PM societies.

We need to remember, also, that this was at the beginning a movement of lay people, who saw need and responded to it and, when God began to do things, followed where he led.

In responding to need and following where God led, they discovered methods that were effective in their situation: the camp meeting, open air preaching, processions, and so on. ...

The final feature I would mention is a depth of commitment ... in both the missionaries / ministers, and in the lay people. It relates to how they viewed the need for salvation, the plight of unbelievers, the power of prayer, and so on.

As the discussion unfolds in this thesis, all of these observations find an echo in the description and critique of the movement.

Edwin Weller's 1976 History Study for the B. Ed. degree at King Alfred's College, Winchester, concerns "The Origin and Development of Primitive Methodism in the Romsey Area." The Romsey Mission was an offshoot of Mitcheldever Circuit, which gives the short study relevance to this thesis. His more general sections on PM history and on north-west Hampshire are very derivative, but he turns to original research for Romsey and area. He notes the "cordial relationship existing between the Primitive Methodists and Baptists in the town," which (he says) runs counter to the national picture, though this thesis would gainsay that assertion.

Shorter works which contribute in minor ways to this dissertation are Kitching (ca 2001) about the Meon valley; Ayres and Sanders (1988) on the chapels of the Silchester Circuit; Harper (1932) on Brinkworth; and Borrett (2008), focusing on Andover, including baptismal registers and the Swing

Riots. In the main these works are descriptive rather than analytical.

Social and religious Background

The Hampshire record office houses a range of village histories, a number of which offer information on Methodist congregations and buildings. It also has the *Victoria History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* in which Volume 5, edited by William Page, carries a long article on agriculture in Hampshire, supplying much information for this study.

Clifford 1876

Clifford's paper to the Baptist Union, summarising the condition of Dissent in the rural areas of England, although published 24 years after the close of this study, summarises the situation that had developed over the years leading up to 1876 and gives valuable insight into Nonconformity in the kind of community where PMism operated in Hampshire.

Cobbett 1830 (edition 1985), Jefferies 1892 (edition 1981), Heath 1893, Bettey 1987, McLeod 1996

There is a wealth of writing on English social history, but this thesis draws mainly on Heath, Jefferies, Cobbett, and Bettey, selected for their special relevance to Hampshire. Cobbett, son of a Surrey farmer, describes in *Rural Rides* his horseback journeys in the English countryside including Hampshire in the 1820s and comments on Methodism there. Jefferies, born in Wiltshire in 1848, the son of a small farmer or smallholder near Swindon, writes about the everyday life of labourers and comments on Methodism among them. Heath travelled in Hampshire later in the Victorian age and gave vivid descriptions of rural life. Bettey writes about rural life in Wessex till 1900, describing "the life and work of the people who lived in the rural communities of a large part of southern England".

McLeod covers the period 1850-1914 and therefore overlaps only slightly with the period of this study. Nonetheless, his assessment of PM motivation for the use of female preachers concurs with the argument of this thesis (Chapter 7C), and his insights into social and religious change during his period helped set the context for the discussion of the transition within Methodism which began in

about 1840.

Thompson 1939

Flora Thompson's autobiographical evocation of life in the 1880s in the Oxfordshire hamlet of Juniper Hill, inhabited predominantly by agricultural labourer families, in which she repeatedly observes that the way of life continued largely unchanged till immediately after the period she depicts, yields several insights into life in similar communities in northern Hampshire, including her comments on 'the ranters'.

Thompson 1968

Thompson's parents were Wesleyan missionaries; he was educated partly at Kingswood School. He was a member of the British Communist Party till 1956, and continued to write thereafter from a Marxist perspective.

Part 1 (Chapter 11) deals mainly with the age of Wesley and an earlier Methodism than that of this study. Part 2 sets out his famous metaphorical theory of a "chiliasm of despair". Chiliasm is the belief in a thousand-year reign on earth of Christ after his Second Coming, a time of plenty and peace. Thompson asks why Methodism managed to function as a religion both of the proletariat and of their exploiters. His reply is threefold: indoctrination of children; the fellowship of the Methodist community; and the chiliasm of despair.

"Many working people turned to religion as a 'consolation', even though the dreams inspired by Methodist doctrine were scarcely happy" (page 418). He propounds (page 427) "a revivalist pulsation, or oscillation between periods of hope and periods of despair and spiritual anguish. ... whenever hope revived, religious revivalism was set aside, only to reappear with renewed fervour upon the ruins of the political messianism which had been overthrown." He asserts that notable revivalist growth is close in time to maximum political activity, but admits that "the nature of the relationship remains obscure: ... it is possible that religious revivalism took over just at the point where 'political' or temporal aspirations met with defeat." Sheard (1980:530, 818) disagrees:

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that all the early local leaders of Primitive Methodism were representatives of groups finding themselves under economic and

psychological pressure in the industrial and agrarian revolutions, who sought 'refuge' in revivalist Christianity.

...there is not a great deal of support for Thompson's hypothesis that the revivalists advanced as radicalism waned.

More specifically relevant to Hampshire are the words (pages 428-9) that "the revivalist fervour of 1831-4 may in part be attributed to the campaigns in the rural counties of the south and east, in the aftermath of the 'Last Labourers' Revolt'." But "the suggestion is tentative." His theory of Methodist oscillation between growth and withdrawal due to political hope and despair cannot be gainsaid or confirmed within the parameters of this study, as there was no further period of agricultural revolt following the Swing Riots.

His view of Methodism is one of gloom and hostility, a mechanism for bending the will of the workers to submissive toil in obedience to their exploiters: "a religion whose theological tenets were those of submissiveness and the sanctification of labour" (page 437). Hempton (2005) describes Thompson as a great Marxist historian. In *Religious Revival and the Transformation of English Sensibilities in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1998. www.victorianweb.org/religion/intro.html) Herbert Schlossberg, referring to Thompson and Hobsbawm, explains that:

Their position, similar to Marx's, has been that the religious sentiments connected with Methodism had a kind of soporific effect that numbed the sensibilities of the people to the misery of their condition, thus permitting conditions of injustice to persist that revolution might have put aright.

Methodism gave labourers aspirations which were not of this world, enervated their vitality, individuality and enterprise, and caused them to accept their providential distresses with saturnine resignation. Watts (1995:626) explains that for Thompson "religion in the first half of the nineteenth century was a weapon used by industrialists to discipline their workforce" via the inculcation of an ethic of obedience and diligence.

Hobsbawm 1957 (Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain)

Eric Hobsbawm was “one of the leading historians of the 20th century, ... whose work influenced generations of historians and politicians”⁹. Hughes-Warrington (2000:170) says, “Hobsbawm has no doubt that Marx’s materialist vision of history offers the best guide to transformations of the world since the Middle Ages.” His work will frequently be referred to. This 1957 essay, however, is mainly about the early Wesleyans in the eighteenth century, and Halévy’s theory that Methodism saved Britain from a revolution such as had occurred elsewhere in Europe.

Hobsbawm 1959 (Primitive Rebels)

This book deals with a range of countries, banditry, rural secret societies, peasant revolutionary movements, pre-industrial urban mobs, ritual in labour and revolutionary organisations, and labour religious sects, “a phenomenon of archaic industrialism” (page 7). Only Chapter VIII (regarding the last category) is relevant here, and is substantially about PMism.

British labour sects were the exception to the secularism of continental equivalents, for in Britain there was a close link between traditional religion and labour movements. The period 1805-50 saw most of the widespread turning to Protestant Dissent, in years which correlated with periods of economic and social strain, including 1831-4, the time of the Reform Bill and the Poor Law. Hobsbawm perceives a parallelism between movements of religious, social and political consciousness within the period ca 1790-1855. During those years, many workers were swept into Dissent in “the periodic and semi-hysterical ‘revivals’” which targeted their problems by salvation and acceptance of providence, encouraging devotees to turn their backs on the world and look towards eternal glory; it did not lead people to engage in concerted struggle for communities.

PMism, Hobsbawm says, advanced most rapidly in the years 1815-48, the period of maximum social discontent and industrialism, and militancy became systematic among them, especially among miners and farm labourers. He gives as examples Durham miners in 1844, and agricultural unions which arose in the 1870s; his other examples are undated. On page 139 he writes, adding his own emphasis, that “the *direct* connexion between Primitive Methodism and the labour movement was small. ... It is difficult to see any trace of collectivist political or economic ideas among them [the leaders]”. Giving examples of men who became labour leaders, he again refers to Durham miners

9 *The Guardian*, 1 October 2012

and Norfolk agricultural workers, and asserts that their political activism often followed evangelical conversion, but admits that “these impressions may well be mistaken” (page 141). On pages 146-7 he writes about the masses who grew up as an agricultural proletariat remote from the world of radical politics. “Theirs” he says “was a pre-political discontent, and the propaganda of the radicals and freethinkers from the cities could often as yet hardly affect them, even when it reached them.” He concludes that the labour sects’ “practical contribution can be reduced to little more than a few organizational and propagandist devices, and to some invaluable pioneering work among certain groups of miners and farm-labourers” (page 149). All of this supports the argument of this thesis, that those who portray early PMism as a politically active radical movement are in error.

Hobsbawm and Rudé 1969 (Captain Swing)

Hobsbawm and Rudé are informative concerning the Swing Riots, but they draw no conclusions as to reasons for the coincidence in time and place of riot and Methodism. They are also informative concerning the social conditions in Hampshire, giving a comprehensive description of the social structure of agricultural villages, especially in the period 1790-1850, and relating the mutation of the farm-worker’s lot from a live-in servant who was part of the farmer’s household to a proletarianised wage-earner. They track the rise in prices during the Napoleonic wars and the following collapse in prices; the increase in population; the resultant surplus of labourers; the introduction of threshing machines; the effect all this had on the workers’ ‘contracts’, in that they became hired for very much shorter, and thus less secure, periods.

The change to wage-earner put the burden of inflation on the agricultural poor, whilst enclosures robbed them of land for grazing, crop-growing or firewood. The farmers grew richer, the labourers poorer. Labourers’ status was eroded, and their condition was worsened by the Speenhamland system (see Chapter 3A), widely introduced and practised from 1795 till the 1830s.

Those were the most relevant parts of the book for this thesis. It goes on to narrate the events of the uprising and its aftermath, pointing out that no direct continuity can be traced between the 1830 riots and the 1872 agricultural unions.

The authors wrote: “A nonconformist congregation in a village is a clear indication of some group which wishes to assert its independence of squire and parson, for few more overt gestures of independence could then be conceived than the public refusal to attend the official church.” There is

truth in this statement, but it gives the viewpoint of the upper social stratum. The primary sources do not suggest that the PM mission founded churches out of a desire “to assert its independence of squire and parson”; people came to PM meetings because there they were offered “a full, present and free salvation” which was not being set before them by the established churches. Their *motive* is being misinterpreted.

It is an odd quirk that Hobsbawm’s assessment of the PMs largely confirms the findings of this research: he may regret the PMs’ “obsession” with eternity “with a zeal which not even Communism can rival” (*Primitive Rebels*:136) and wish they had directed their energies to political agitation rather than the world to come, but he confirms the events discovered in the primary sources.

Everitt 1972

Everitt based his ideas about the ownership of property on information in *The Imperial Gazette* of 1870, and his data about the distribution of denominations on the 1851 religious census. He asks “in what types of rural community did Dissent tend to find a foothold and flourish?” (page 7), focusing on Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Kent. He concedes (page 12) that he “does not believe that all the differences in the distribution of Dissent can be explained in terms of diverse rural economies. ... much was certainly due to purely personal and fortuitous causes,” and warns (page 46) that “it must be emphasized that these generalizations should not be pressed too far. ... they were not universally valid.”

He argues that Dissenting, including Methodist, chapels often seem to be associated with parishes where the property is in the hands of multiple landowners. If the land belongs to one, or to only a few, magnates, the presence of Dissenting chapels is sparse. The greater the subdivision of the land, the greater the presence of Dissent, as small landowners did not have enough individual power to impose their wishes.

He also finds Dissent strong in “frontier settlements”, boundaries between parishes, common land between parishes where jurisdiction is difficult to establish, settlements on waste land outside of parishes, villages which were decayed market towns, often near to parish boundaries or subdivided in land ownership, parishes with dispersed hamlets or subsidiary townships, in which the Dissenting chapel could be situated at a distance from the parish church, and parishes where the landlord was

non-resident. Such parishes provided relative freedom for Dissenters wishing to meet in homes (whence they might otherwise be evicted) or to erect chapels. He also calculated that Methodism was usually represented in smaller, arable parishes.

However, Vickers (1987:385-7) points out that for Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire, information on land-ownership appears to have been given for less than 25% of parishes, and observes: “The difficulties which beset any attempt to test Everitt’s general thesis by an examination of the evidence from these southern counties are therefore considerable. His general conclusions are largely confirmed, but detailed statistical analysis is of doubtful value.” Hatcher (1993:331) comments, “An examination of the parishes without a Primitive Methodist chapel reveals the question of land ownership to be one of several factors, but not necessarily the key issue in this region.” Calder comments that “the ‘closed village’ argument is - for me at least - deeply flawed. ... Until you can demonstrate a causal connection, the selective coincidence of patterning is not proof”¹⁰. Nonetheless Snell and Ell (2000:378) write regarding landownership and, *inter alia*, PMs, that “there is a striking upward progression of their figures as one looks ... from ‘closed’ to ‘open’ parishes - reversing the sequence of the Church of England.”

In northern Hampshire, whereas Newnham exemplifies the difficulties of getting established without a chapel, Micheldever disproves any necessary link between landownership and the success or failure of PM evangelism.

Ward 1972

Ward surveys religion and society in England 1790-1850 but makes only three brief references to Hampshire, all to the late eighteenth century. The book covers much ground in time and geography, and little is said about any one aspect. However, he outlines the development of the teetotal movement, and identifies the 1840s and 1850s as the watershed between true revival and revivalism. Both these themes figure largely in this thesis.

Boase 1976

One of a series on folklore edited by Venetia Newell, the book claims to be “the first book devoted

¹⁰ email, 20.7.2013

entirely to the rich heritage of folklore from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.” It has nine chapters, each focusing on one aspect of local lore, belief and custom, the ones most relevant here being about religion, death and nature. Examples are given of a number of phenomena similar to those discovered among the early Hampshire PMs, and Boase writes (page 17): “The motifs of many of the traditions and stories recorded here ... are found all over Britain,” thus linking her study with geographically more general scholarly literature.

Watts 1995

Volume II of Watts runs to 932 pages, covers the years 1791-1869, studies Old and New Dissent, plus Unitarians and Swedenborgians, and comments on missionary enterprise, statistics, geography, psychology, methods of evangelism, preaching, buildings, discipline, ministers, ministerial training, Sunday schools, baptismal and other registers, politics, social trends, female preachers, and the theories of Currie, Everett, Thompson, Halévy, Hobsbawm, and Weber (the last, not impinging on this study, concerns wealthy Dissenting entrepreneurs). Concerning Currie, he writes (pages 39, 46): “There is some evidence to support Currie’s generalization, but in the cases both of Old Dissent and of Methodism it must be qualified. ... in many parts of the country there was no obvious connection between the success of Methodism and of Old Dissent and inadequate provision by the Church of England.” Concerning Everitt (1972), he observes (page 114) that, “The Church of England was at its most powerful in the compact nucleated villages in the arable lands of southern and eastern England where parishes were of manageable size and where the land was owned by a single landlord sympathetic to the Church of England.”

Such a wide-ranging study cannot explore in detail the PMs of this thesis; nonetheless, light is shed on the background and occasionally on the focus of this thesis, and Watts’ observations are commented on in appropriate sections.

His selection of baptismal registers for statistical analysis of male Dissenters omits PMs in Hampshire, but he does reveal that lower and unskilled workers made up 74.1% in Berkshire in 1830-7, and 72.7% in Wiltshire, the counties from which PMism spread into northern Hampshire.

Snell & Ell 2000

This is a study of the 1851 religious census together with a few earlier sources, focusing on the geography of the various denominations and using much statistical analysis, and shows that northern Hampshire was one of the PMs' strongest areas. Its 500+ pages include a parish-level study of fifteen parishes in England and Wales but not in Hampshire, Berkshire or Wiltshire. Pages 135-44 concern the PMs, "a more participatory and democratic church" than the Wesleyans. Agreeing with much other writing, the book sees causes of PM success as changes in the pattern of rural society in the 1820s and 1830s including the decline of paternalism; failures of rural protest including 1830-1; antagonism to the new poor law; Anglican weakness; anticlerical sentiment arising from Anglican association with land reorganisation and enclosure. PMism was often the faith to which rural labourers turned "as they struggled for basic human recognition", being "strongly associated with the more rural areas".

Pages 191-4 assert that "old dissent and the Church of England were co-associated, tending to be strong in the same regions" whilst Wesleyans and Primitives "went hand in hand regionally - this relation was the strongest result of the analysis. ... By comparison, old and new dissent were negatively associated." This seems at variance with the area of this thesis, where Baptists and Quakers were sparsely represented, Independents¹¹ comparatively strong, the Established Church described as negligent of the rural masses, Wesleyans almost absent, and PMs remarkably successful and widespread.

Knight 2008

Knight's study of the nineteenth century church surveys western Christianity, Protestant and Roman, in Britain, Europe, North America, Africa, India, China, Australasia and Oceania, critiquing subjects of transnational significance. Although much of the book does not therefore impinge directly on this study, the fact (page xix) that her central interest is what Christianity meant to ordinary people, as a supernatural belief system and institution impinging on their daily lives, prompts several references to it in the following chapters.

¹¹ Independent is an old name for Congregational.

Origin and Nature of Revival

Bebbington 2012

From Bebbington it may be concluded that the early PMs held the 'classic' view of revival (which Bebbington calls *providential*). The book reviews a range of interpretations which theologians and historians have offered of the origin and nature of evangelical revival. He begins with the 'providential' interpretation, i.e. that it is due to divine intervention, but believes that Evangelicals have tended to chronicle but not to analyse the events of revivals. Psychological interpretation concentrates on emotional excitement, especially among people of little education or critical training. The 'Frontier Thesis' attributes revival to conditions of the expanding American frontier. The theory of social control, favoured by Marxists among others, believes that revival is a phenomenon in which emotional violence is employed to turn converts into docile workers and loyal subjects rather than radical political activists. Others have argued that revival is prompted by economic change. Another theory holds that revival is a feature of the consolidation and christianising of a nation.

All the revivals studied manifested emphasis on the Bible, the Cross, conversion, activism, expectant prayer, and significant active involvement of women and laymen, and all were in differing measures both spontaneous (that is, not contrived or 'worked up') and fostered by the actions of their participants.

THESES

Theses fall into three types, focusing on a geographical area; an aspect of PMism; or Methodism more widely including PMism. Most research, with variations for date and place, draws on similar sources in county or Methodist libraries: the denominational magazine, other PM publications, conference, district and circuit archives (principally minutes, preaching plans, baptismal registers, account books, annual reports, chapel deeds, manuscripts), newspapers, local histories, maps, directories, and official publications including the 1851 religious census. Earlier theses tend to be more descriptive and narrative in style, with less critical analysis save repetitive discussion of Currie (1967) and Everitt (1972). They also consider developments which contributed to later difficulty and decline. In later theses critique and appraisal increase. It is a happy coincidence that Garratt (2002)

studies Shropshire, from which PMism spread to Wessex, and that Calder (2012) challenges hagiography, as does this thesis.

Morris 1967

Morris's doctoral thesis from Nottingham University, entitled "Primitive Methodism in Nottinghamshire 1815-1932", is a ground-breaking work, being the first on PMism. Despite inconsistencies or shortcomings, there is much that is original, perceptive and thought-provoking. Covering a period of 117 years, with a postscript on the period after 1932, as against the 23 years of the present thesis, Morris writes about the origin, maturity and decline of PMism in Nottinghamshire from social, educational, political, theological and ethical perspectives. He comments at length on the democratic, non-clerical character of the denomination's polity.

His study contains much that is familiar from Hampshire: female preachers, camp meetings, large audiences, visits from denominational founders, formation of circuits, financial weakness, debt, poorly paid working-class membership, building or buying chapels, rapid growth and expansion till 1870 (with some stagnation 1852-5), travelling preachers sent to other parts of England, thus consolidating the homogeneity of the movement nationally, services in cottages, barns and the open air, singing in the streets associated with evangelistic preaching, emotional and ecstatic preaching, praying and singing, emphasis on conversion and entire sanctification, arduous walks for preachers in all weathers, short duration of some societies, visitation of homes by travelling preachers, prayer leaders, prayer meetings, protracted meetings, lovefeasts, days of fasting, missed local preaching appointments, disapproval of long sermons, personal feuds among members: all of this will be met in the Hampshire study. However, many developments are mentioned without date or chronology, which makes some of the study hard to correlate chronologically with Hampshire.

There are further similarities. Nottinghamshire became a centre for PM expansion to other parts. It was predominantly a rural, village movement. Town success was much less than in villages, and "The early Primitive Methodists concentrated their evangelism on the villages rather than the towns" (page 381). Morris gives a perceptive commentary on PM legalism.

He records opposition to the early preachers: throwing of eggs, tomatoes and other missiles, opposition and disruption to meetings, the turning away of children of PM parents from Anglican Sunday School, eviction threatened by an Anglican clergyman landlord if services continued in a

cottage, and refusal of burial¹². Nonetheless, the persecution seems to have been less physically brutal than in Hampshire.

There were other differences between the two counties. When PMs came to Nottinghamshire in 1815, Wesleyans were well established. The New Connexion, Wesleyan Methodist Association, and Independent Methodists were also present. In 1851 Baptists had eight chapels with congregations of over 1000, and Congregationalists had 21 chapels. All this contrasts with northern Hampshire.

Morris's critique of the movement seems variable. On the one hand he claims that "all the evidence would suggest that Primitive Methodism was a genuine expression of the work of The Holy Spirit ... highly successful in channelling the Love of God to many thousands of people whose lives were completely changed. ... Under the instrumentality of Primitive Methodism thousands of people experienced for the first time salvation from the power and guilt of sin, and the assurance of God's continuing presence, guidance and love" (pages 368-70). On the other hand (pages 94-5), writing of Peake, he claims that "by his wide learning and sound judgement" and "his realistic and sensible approach" Peake "liberalised theology", and he writes approvingly of the new theological fashions, despite the fact that they arose simultaneously with enervation and numerical decline. Morris fails to validate this perspective. Also, he repeatedly likens the early PMs to 'fundamentalists' (with small f), yet this argument is dissonant by virtue of being an anachronism, as Fundamentalism did not arise till a century later, as Morris concedes.

Morris also argues (page 381) that the early PM concentration on rural evangelism in contrast to towns "proved to be a policy of doubtful wisdom." This cannot be confirmed from northern Hampshire, where no pattern of increased success seems to have been initiated by the shift of circuit head from Shefford and Micheldever to Newbury (1846) and Basingstoke (1853), whilst Andover did not become head of a circuit till 1837. The work in the villages around Silchester was based on Reading in the mid 1830s, but it thrived sufficiently to be made a circuit in 1870 which consisted entirely of village societies. The mission to Winchester did not begin till 1837¹³. Basingstoke did not feature regularly on the preaching plan till 1840. Garratt (2002) shows that the Shropshire mission chose Prees Green (1825), Cwm, Herefordshire (1826) and Minsterley (1856) as circuit heads, despite their being small villages. Tiller (2006:97) records striking success in rural Oxfordshire. Sheard (1980) gives details of difficulties in Wrexham, Nantwich and Chester, and writes:

¹² It was not till 1880 that Dissenters could conduct burials in parish graveyards.

¹³ Petty (1880:348)

The Primitive Methodists are generally reckoned to have been shy of major towns, and to have missioned surrounding rural areas first ... by 1851 it is clear that the real strength of the denomination lay outside the major urban centres, in the rural areas and smaller market towns.

Magazine (1845:240) urges all preachers never to think village preaching dishonourable, “for it is the reverse”, observing that “it was practised by Christ.” Watts (1995:129) observes that “Dissent, even with the addition of the Methodists, was struggling in the mid-nineteenth century” in large towns. It is hard to accept that prioritising villages was “a policy of doubtful wisdom”, especially when it is borne in mind that later shifts to concentration on towns was (and remains) concurrent with decline. Elected President of the Methodist Conference in 1949, Sangster (1947:18) argued thus:

In hundreds of villages in this country the only evangelical interpretation of the Gospel is in the Methodist chapel. ... The importance of this in the spiritual life of England could barely be exaggerated. The withdrawal of this ministry would be a calamity which few who care for spiritual things could contemplate with equanimity.

Greaves 1968

This doctoral thesis from Liverpool University, entitled “Methodism in Yorkshire 1740-1851”, contributed little to this thesis. The time scale is very long, and the discussion ranges over many varieties of Methodism, especially Wesleyan, Primitive, Free and New Connexion, but mainly Wesleyan. Regarding Currie, Greaves comments, “The theory of Methodist growth which the findings of the case studies support is not identical, then, to that put forward by Currie, although there are large areas of agreement” (page 248).

Sheard 1980

Michael Sheard’s doctoral thesis from Manchester University is on “The Origins and early Development of Primitive Methodism in Cheshire and South Lancashire 1800-1860”. The Abstract states that “many of the conclusions are based on statistical material.” He offers statistical, chronological and biographical charts, maps, and graphs.

He devotes 92 pages to the origins of PMism, and then largely a year by year, place by place study of the circuits, with very little commentary, and no exploration of the movement's inner ethos. He shows the work failing and being given up in some places, thriving in others, and frequently remarks that no obvious explanation for success or failure, increase or decline, is discernible. Features familiar from Hampshire include crowded, emotional meetings. He notes (page 211) concerning Whitchurch, Shropshire, that when the tiny cottage used by PMs proved too small, the Baptists offered their chapel for a service every Sunday afternoon until the PMs were able to open their own in 1840. Such friendly interdenominational relations are noted also in Hampshire.

There follow statistical tables comparing PMs with other religious bodies including Roman Catholics, Mormons and Unitarians. Sheard's analysis of baptismal registers leads to the comment (pages 503, 508) that they "give support to a picture of a religious community composed largely of ordinary working people, some of whom were amongst the lowest paid of the work-force" and offers the conclusion that the picture of PMism as a predominantly working class sect is accurate. He briefly discusses Thompson's "chiliasm of despair", concluding (pages 818-9) that there is not a great deal of support for Thompson's hypothesis that the revivalists advanced as radicalism waned, and that it "is certainly not applicable to Cheshire." On page 856 he mentions, without critique, Everitt's thoughts on the effect of landownership on obtaining land for a chapel. He directs attention to the youth and inexperience of some of the itinerant preachers.

His method is to select a topic, and exemplify it in meticulous detail with reference to individual people or places. He does not primarily discuss or analyse, but where he has done so, on topics selected also for this present dissertation, his assessments and perspectives are critiqued in chapters below.

Ambler 1984

Ambler's subtitle to his doctorate from the University of Hull is "Aspects of rural Society in south Lincolnshire with specific Reference to Primitive Methodism, 1815-1875". He studies an area similar in character to Hampshire, with agriculture dominating in the first half-century and only limited industrial development. The thesis provides suggestive comparisons with Hampshire and demonstrates that PMism was homogeneous in the two areas.

He begins with 134 pages on geography and social history, with almost no reference to Methodism and with much on the second half of the century. He writes at length about the geography, geology, farming, and classification of villages into four types ranging from 'closed' to 'open', referring to Everitt's analysis and giving specific Lincolnshire examples. By 1851, the PMs were concentrated in the open villages for (page 81) "The people of the open villages were free to develop independent ways of life ... including Primitive Methodism."

Chapter 3 turns to the establishment of PMism. He mentions the difficulty of getting land for a chapel in places where landowners were unsympathetic, and of efforts to control tenants even in their own homes or barns. Meetings were held in homes, barns, or rented premises, but progress was sometimes retarded or ended where no chapel could be built. By 1851 all PM chapels were in settlements that were divided among many owners. Chapels gave respectability, but open-air preaching continued.

There were female preachers, loud, emotional meetings, camp meetings, midweek services, family visiting by the full-time ministers. In contrast to Hampshire, Wesleyans were the largest Dissenting body in 1851, followed by PMs, with Baptists not far behind, though in different parts of the region. There is little mention of persecution.

Attempts were made to discredit PMism, and its corybantic meetings were despised. However, the popular beliefs and superstitions of the rural working classes constituted an important element in PM success (page 212). Ambler (like Boase (1976)) points out that folk beliefs in Lincolnshire were not peculiar to that county but were local variants of more widely dispersed beliefs. He also records that reforming clergy of the Church of England tried to suppress folk religion and the associated practices, leaving it isolated and confined to people's private lives. PMism gave its converts "a more comprehensive view of life and the hereafter than the traditional folk beliefs" (page 251), including the hope of heaven and of reunion with deceased loved ones.

PM preachers sometimes came under suspicion as possible "agents of social unrest". Chapter 5 deals with rural discontent in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. Protest took clandestine forms such as cattle maiming, machine breaking, and incendiarism, but there were no Swing riots. The local press did not point to any links between PMs and rural protest, and Ambler, referring to the unrest of 1842-55, says "there is no evidence of any connection between rural discontent and the growth of Primitive Methodism," adding that PMism needed a stable background to maintain its flow of income, and therefore tended to prioritise a conservative social stance. He says (pages 266-7) that

“There is also little evidence that the Primitive Methodists of south Lincolnshire helped to sublimate these discontents by channelling them into religious modes of expression”: that is, there was no chiliasm of despair.

His chapter on Attendance and Membership supplies some relevant facts. In seven villages, PMs were the only alternative to the Church of England; other villages had Wesleyans, and fewer had Baptists or Independents. Baptismal records demonstrate “that the Primitives drew a higher proportion of their support from among the rural working classes and especially labourers. With the development of the towns ... they seemed to have consolidated their position among the craftsmen” (pages 328-9).

The chapter on Chapel Life states that “Building new chapels placed a heavy burden on local societies” for the land, initial building, and maintenance thereafter. The chapter also describes the new revivalism which developed from the mid-1840s, and Ambler notes that camp meetings became much more decorous and formalised. The final chapter includes the beginning of the “temperance” movement, and refers to the agricultural trade unions, showing that they developed, including with PM involvement, no earlier than the 1870s. These data confirm what is found elsewhere in this thesis.

Dews 1984

Dews’ M Phil thesis focusses on the city and area of Leeds 1791-1861. He sees the growth of Methodism as due partly to the failure of the Anglican Church to adapt to social changes arising from industrialisation, and refers to Currie (1967) in support of this thesis, arguing that, to some extent, PMs filled the gaps left by the Church of England and the Wesleyans. He asserts that Methodism met more needs than only the religious, and attracted adherents partly by forms of worship that were meaningful to the population at a time when traditional worship risked alienating rather than attracting worshippers. In 1851 the religious census for the area recorded 41.9% of attendance being Methodist, with Wesleyan dominant and PMs relatively weak. The Old Dissent exercised considerable influence, and the Church of England grew in strength from the late 1830s. Dews notes the Quaker influence on PMism.

Analysing the baptismal records for Leeds 1846-50 Dews concluded (page 404) that “the persons to have their children baptised by Primitive Methodists are drawn almost totally from the industrial working class ... the urban poor are almost absent.”

Graham 1986

Graham writes about the female travelling preachers of early Primitive Methodism. Her thesis was “missing from the shelf” at Birmingham University, and not listed on EThOS at the British Library, and this research was initially unable to consult it; however, three other pieces of writing by Graham, two by the same title as the thesis, distil her findings and theories. Some eighteen months after the formal beginning of this research, her son digitised the original thesis and it became available as <http://primitivemethodistwomen.org/Chosen-by-God-the-Female-Itinerants-of-Early-Primitive->.

Graham provides a detailed and comprehensive study of female preaching in approximately the first half-century of PMism; she also writes extensively about the Wesleyans, and makes reference to the Bible Christians and the Quakers. Much of the thesis supplies summaries of various writers’ views for or against female preaching. Page 201 summarises the thesis:

this research has extended knowledge of the numbers involved and of the role played by the women itinerants. It has been proved that there were many more women in the itinerancy than had been positively identified before, and doubtless there are still more to be found; that women were used primarily in mission and evangelistic situations, even when the women were being phased out; that hired local preachers, local preachers and evangelists continued to be used; that there seems to be a definite link between chapel building and the decline of the phenomenon; that ill-health, the marriage of the women, the demand for a college trained ministry, the growing respectability and increasing conformity of Primitive Methodism to other denominations were all factors which militated against the use of women itinerants.

Her findings show that the character and work of the Hampshire local and travelling female preachers conform to the national pattern. Her arguments and conclusions seemed to be expressed more explicitly or succinctly in the writings which followed the thesis, and are discussed in Chapter 7C below.

Vickers 1987

Vickers writes extensively about various branches of Methodism, including PMism, mainly in “the extent of the original Salisbury Circuit and its later offshoots” minus the Isle of Wight. The Hampshire villages missioned from the Reading base receive no mention. In setting out the sweep of the movement over a wide area, he often gives only tantalising hints or footnotes about details germane to the current study, and deals more with external events and statistics, spending less time on the ethos, experiences and motivation of the movement which is a primary focus of the current writing. He enters the discussions initiated by Currie (1967) and Everitt (1972). Anent Currie he concludes (page 417) that Methodism, unlike the Old Dissent, benefited from Anglican weakness. He correctly terms Everitt’s theory “fairly predictable” (page 384), but adds that whilst Everitt’s general conclusions are largely confirmed, considerable difficulties beset any attempt to test the theory in the southern counties.

Vickers considers at what levels of society Methodism’s appeal was most successful, the relationship between travelling preachers and local leadership, and the relative strength and distribution of the Methodist denominations in 1851. Only pages 217-261 deal specifically with the PMs, and only 236-43 with Shefford, Mitcheldever and Andover Circuits. He demonstrates that the movement was proletarian in character, endured much opposition, and yet enjoyed support from individuals of other Dissenting denominations. All of these findings concur with this thesis.

The approach is largely description rather than critique, with pages 429-31 summarising conclusions which tend to be confirmations of the findings of others rather than new theories: his contribution is the mass of historical data derived from primary sources about an area which has otherwise been little studied.

Johnson 1989

“This is not a study of famous religious leaders but about the religious experiences of ‘ordinary’ members, ... to discover what subjective and distinctive religious responses they made which helped them to come to terms with themselves and their existence, ... to see them from their own angle” says the Abstract. Johnson comments that “most recent academic work on the influence of Methodism is dominated still by secular and political interpretations, thus neglecting the essential spiritual nature of Primitive Methodism.” Johnson wishes “to gain access to the subjective world-

view, and to the beliefs, values and behaviour of those labouring people of a past world. ... to move away from a political, economic and class-bound emphasis towards a more religious consciousness and analysis, to minimise political and secular concerns, for a more 'cultural' approach." He aims "to get beyond an institutional account, and give emphasis to some of the more personal experiences of the individuals who made up the Primitive Methodist movement," emphasising the religion rather than connexional organisation, "to reconstruct the spiritual world of the labouring people. ... to tell the story from the inside." This coincides closely with the current thesis, studying another predominantly agricultural area.

Johnson focuses on biographical accounts including obituaries and baptismal registers, describing class leaders, local preachers and Sunday School teachers. He draws comparisons with the Wesleyans, emphasises PM beliefs in evangelism and holiness, and discusses at length what drew people to PMism, including the nearness of death and cholera. With many pages of testimonies he describes the process of conversion, the commitments expected of members, the effects of PMism on family life, and the response of PMs to ambient culture, with its prominent drink, gambling and rough sport. He devotes a long chapter to the study of PM hymnody as a means for them of articulating, and for the historian of understanding, their beliefs and aspirations.

Johnson portrays a movement with the same beliefs and ethos as the Hampshire PMs, and frequent reference is made to his thesis. However, he does not contrast his perception of the PMs with those of other, including hostile, writers, and thus does not offer critiques comparable with those of this dissertation.

Hatcher 1993

Hatcher focusses on Hull and area 1819-1851, and his writings are frequently quoted in this thesis, though the differences between the large port of Hull and rural Hampshire are too wide to press for meaningful parallels in every matter.

He reviews the pre-PM background of revivalism, and the movement from Mow Cop to Hull, and outlines the social, religious and economic features of Hull. He describes the work of the missionaries, and discusses reasons for their success, arguing that it was not due to a surrounding congenial religious or economic environment, as that was available for other Evangelical groups who failed to match the PMs. He ascribes it to their flexible system, their openness to popular

religion and supernatural phenomena in which the poor were more likely to believe than the élite, their feel-good factor in wearisome lives, their homely nature, and features such as class meetings, society, and circuit. He comments on entire sanctification, working class leadership, the trade cycle, epidemics, other denominations, radical movements, and the teetotal movement. Female preachers were used because of their success, but the denomination remained male dominated.

Chapel debt could be a burden for 2-3 generations, but led not to cutting back the number of travelling preachers but to increasing it (presumably to gain more recruits): Calder (2012) makes the same point.

Some of the PM leadership was made up of disaffected Wesleyans. There were communities where both PMs and Wesleyans were established. A venue for preaching was essential. Land-ownership was one factor, but not the key. PMs did less well in towns and cities.

He gives a chapter to the Lord's Supper, seeing cautious progress towards settled church life. He studies the baptismal registers for the social class of fathers, but (like Calder) precedes his conclusions with immensely long caveats. PMs were essentially working class.

They were not political, but more openness to 'the contemporary world' from 1843 laid the foundation for later political activism. "The hypothesis of E. P. Thompson is not proven within the context of this study" (page 550). Rather, revivalism and radicalism often progressed together. He summarises Thompson's theory by stating that Thompson regarded political activism as good and revivalist religion as a bad substitute for it.

Garrett 2002

Garrett studies PMism in Shropshire 1820-1900. Shropshire was the root, or route, from which PMism came south to Wiltshire and thence to northern Hampshire. It was predominantly agricultural, and PMism made especial inroads among agricultural labourers. PMism spread through the county from the early 1820s. In 1821 there was economic downturn, reduction in wages, and consequent riots, which bears resemblances to the poverty and Swing riots in Hampshire in the 1830s. Citing Currie, Gilbert and Horsley she suggests (pages 173-5) that PM membership experienced cycles of growth and decline of approximately five to ten years' duration, associating these with political or economic trends in society.

Her interest focuses on organisational, structural and statistical matters, including the distribution throughout Shropshire of the major Protestant denominations. Her seventh chapter summarises the theories of Snell and Ell, Currie, Gilbert, Obelkevich and Watts regarding the effects on PM success of landownership, the strength or weakness of the Established Church, types of parish, and the presence of other Nonconformity, and supplies examples from Shropshire and elsewhere. She concludes (page 190) that “it is clear that the structure of landownership did not present a considerable barrier to Primitive Methodist expansion,” although PMs experienced problems with obtaining land for chapels, features repeated in Hampshire. These matters are not major focuses of the present thesis. Garratt comments (page 192) that although “the Established Church did best in more compact parishes where the land was little divided, there were certain exceptions” and adds that PMism thrived in some areas of relative Anglican strength (page 196), and also that “the success of the Primitive Methodist Connexion was indeed very often dependent upon the ‘weakness’ of the Anglicans.” In concluding the chapter, she comments that her research had uncovered “no clear geographical pattern for the location of Primitive Methodist success”, and in comparison with other Dissent, that “Primitive Methodism was generally weakest in those parishes in which it faced considerable competition from other Nonconformist groups.”

In her chapter on the organisation and structure of the connexion, Garratt comments that “circuit committees regularly found it necessary to deal with many missed appointments, ... the neglect of appointments was considered a serious offence. It is clear that making preachers attend to their engagements was a constant battle.” This feature is much in evidence in Hampshire. She also writes (Chapter 8) of the financial difficulties that circuits experienced in paying the preachers. The chapter also observes, as is likewise mirrored in Hampshire, that many preaching places were short-lived, whilst in others [like Newnham in Hampshire] repeated attempts were made and achieved lasting success.

Chapter 8, largely on PMs’ methods, gives a description of their evangelistic tactics which corresponds closely with those employed in Hampshire. She also mentions varied forms of opposition and persecution from all ranks of society.

It is not always clear what she means. When she writes that “the simple evangelistic message ... was readily accepted by their unsophisticated inhabitants,” to what extent does she link lack of sophistication with belief in a simple evangel? Does her statement (page 209) that “Converts were made but often deserted, as roving evangelists keen to move onto pastures new, failed to consolidate their gains into permanent societies” mean “they were made but were deserted”, or “they were made but they deserted”? The former would seem dissonant with the diligence in Hampshire in setting up societies, class meetings, mid-week meetings, and continual family visits.

Calder 2012

Like this thesis, Calder seeks to tone down hagiography, but writes about a different aspect. Also, he sees “much of the twentieth-century academic attention to religious history” as “sociological in character, concerned with the collective at the expense of the individual dimensions”, and he attempts to rectify that balance by understanding the PMs as individuals.

In Chapter 1, commenting on the remarkable success of the PMs, compared with that of the Wesleyans, Bible Christians and New Connexion, he sums up many factors thus:

It was due to their ability, more than any other competitor, to deploy the right mechanisms ... and thereby to bind the faithful more securely to their church. They generated awareness and publicity via their Ranter image, street preaching, communal singing and camp-meetings which enabled them to outperform in moving the disinclined into the potentially interested group; the combination of low barriers to attendance at worship, the modest status of their preachers, a lack of central control that allowed flexible responses to local realities, and a heightened sense of community made it easier for the potentially interested to sample what was on offer and to make that offer more immediately relevant; the drama of their worship practice pulled more people across the commitment boundary to membership; and the active nature of that membership – because the Prims performed rather than merely consumed their worship – welded the faithful to the movement.

This concurs with much that is written below concerning Hampshire.

Calder’s main thesis is that PMism is usually seen as a product of its working-class origins, but “that whilst the movement saw itself thus, its leaders were from the outset often discreetly prosperous. ...

the predominantly working-class composition of the denomination which has so dominated subsequent accounts was a mature product of its religious nature, not the source of its success.” He argues that PMism chose to project that image, and it became self-fulfilling. Hugh Bourne was its first chronicler and chose to portray them as humble latter-day disciples, but his diaries, marginalised or ignored by later writers, tell a different story. Historians read the myth as a factual account. In terms of veiled prosperity among the leaders he may be correct, but this thesis does not pursue the question, if only because only meagre information is available about the early social backgrounds of most of the Hampshire preachers, and because their later lives and possible prosperity lie beyond the period.

Calder deals largely with more northerly areas of England, and a wider timescale, and the facts he amasses fail to gainsay the description of the movement’s first generation in Hampshire. Nonetheless in nuancing the standard picture, his thesis resonates with this dissertation in arguing that some later Methodists have sought to make the early PMs into something they were not.

Woolley (2013)

Woolley’s doctoral thesis is subtitled *Retelling the Primitive Methodist creation narrative*. Its Abstract declares that “This research looks at the emergence of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in the period 1800-1812, ... It examines the ‘creation narrative’ the Connexion told about its beginnings,” a scheme which is repeated on page 22: “This survey of Primitive Methodist historiography will focus upon the telling of the denominational story of origins or ‘creation narrative’.” Consequently it has little to contribute to this study of events and ethos in Hampshire two and more decades later, beyond Woolley’s well-informed first chapter (pages 22-54), which is a comprehensive overview of PM historiography from Hugh Bourne’s first publication on the theme in 1818 to Milburn (2002).

Truss (2015?)

Truss’s doctoral thesis with Leeds University on Primitive Methodism in the Yorkshire Wolds is being written concurrently with this thesis, and she hopes to submit it in 2015. She has kindly allowed access to Chapters 3 and 4. She refers to persecution, progress, difficulty and setbacks, and records that PMism spread rapidly across the Wolds, penetrating in the 1840s into the more remote villages. In discussing reasons for their success, she cites the popular appeal of the religion itself,

the weakness of the Anglican churches, and the comparative ease with which, in many places, permission was given to build chapels. Her thesis demonstrates that the rural Wolds duplicated much that this research discovered in Hampshire, including the central importance of prayer, and the intense emotion of meetings.

CHAPTER 2:

METHODOLOGY

Ernest Renan, in the Introduction to his *Life of Jesus* (1863), states:

To write the history of a religion, it is necessary, firstly, to have believed it (otherwise we should not be able to understand how it has charmed and satisfied the human conscience); in the second place, to believe it no longer in an absolute manner, for absolute faith is incompatible with sincere history.

This dissertation resonates with each half of this dictum: its study of PMism seeks *to understand how it has charmed and satisfied the human conscience*; it also seeks to uncover and correct the excessive eulogy of some who *believe it in an absolute manner*. Further, it contributes the first historical account of the spread of PMism into northern Hampshire. It demonstrates, from a study of events, leaders, beliefs and ethos, that the first generation in northern Hampshire attained in Ritson's eponymous expression "most astonishing achievements", but also that they do not wholly match the words of some of their admirers. The movement's detractors also have often given an incomplete or erroneous assessment or portrayal. Against both eulogies and detractions, more faithful depictions will be offered to correct imbalance or distortion.

The thesis is constructed as follows. After setting the social and religious background, and showing that Hampshire PMism shared the denomination's national character, it chronicles the selected period, supplying many examples of the seven main features of the movement which have frequently attracted comment from popular and academic writers from Victorian times to the present day. The ensuing chapters comment on their critiques of each of those features, considering first unsympathetic and secondly admiring depictions and assessments.

With this set of aims, the methodology aims to establish that:

- detractors reported facts which are in accord with the findings of this research, but the metanarrative that lies behind their critique cannot be justified (Chapter 6A)

- detractors' narrative facts are correct but their understanding of the PM's inner world and motivation is distorted (Chapter 6B-C);
- hagiography is justified, but should be balanced or modified by awareness of less winsome features (Chapter 7A-C);
- narrative is erroneous and therefore a certain admiration misplaced (Chapter 7D).

Engagement with other writers is attempted, not by means of a separate section on each author, but thematically. By original interpretation and critical engagement it compares and contrasts the movement with a range of appraisals, arguing that there is imbalance in much popular and scholarly comment, from Victorian times to the present, and aiming to rectify imbalance, correct errors, bring greater completeness where there are lacunæ, and confirm appraisals where appropriate, thus bringing criticism into line with primary sources. Focusing on seven areas of frequent comment, the dissertation demonstrates that the first generation of PMs in the four circuits of northern Hampshire do not wholly match the words of their admirers or detractors.

The approach is emic, that is, an attempt to experience or feel the religion from within, tasting the ethos of its world from the perspective of its members. Few writers have come to light who have attempted to penetrate the inner heart of PMism: Ritson (1911), Farndale (1950), Johnson (1989) and Hempton (2005) alone come to mind. The first, a popular book, focuses on the romance of the movement; the second, a published lecture, on prayer; the third, a doctoral thesis, looks at length at hymnody; the fourth, a scholarly study, is largely about eighteenth century Wesleyans and about America. Only Ritson specifically mentions Hampshire, and that comparatively briefly. Hempton (2005:206) comments appositely that “academic historians and theologians have neither displayed imaginative empathy nor constructed convincing analytical paradigms for coming to terms with such religious expression”. Thus, the twofold aim of this thesis is to contribute originally to the historical record and to the understanding of that record.

Use of Primary Sources

Primary sources take priority, both unpublished manuscript material, and published writings of authors who played a part in the events or had some connection with them, whether they wrote during the period of the thesis (1830-52), or set down their thoughts at a later date.

The first task was to establish the facts regarding the movement in northern Hampshire, which was done almost entirely from primary material, as very little else has been written. Occasionally an illustration of some point was taken from a more distant geographical region, but only if it might reasonably be assumed to be an undocumented feature also of PMism in Hampshire.

The five key archival centres in England were visited for their wealth of primary material. These are: Englesea Brook Primitive Methodist Museum; the WHS library at Oxford Brookes University; the County Record Offices at Winchester and Reading; and the John Rylands library, Manchester. The most fruitful were Englesea Brook and Winchester. Reading holds the archives for all the Hampshire churches in the earlier Reading Circuit. Englesea Brook has a complete collection of the Magazine for the period of this study. Circuit preaching Plans are held both at Englesea Brook and at the county record offices. Rare out-of-print PM publications from the Victorian period are in the denominational collections, as are the annual Minutes of Conference. Oxford Brookes and Rylands were especially helpful for the 18th and 19th centuries Wesleyan background. Gladstone's Library in Hawarden is a rich source of background reading, with its wide range of books relating to Methodist and Nonconformist history.

Material was deemed relevant if it referred directly to the part of Hampshire in the study or to people who ministered there, or to people who served elsewhere but enjoyed personal association with the Hampshire preachers. It quickly became apparent from all this that PMism in northern Hampshire in its first generation did not differ in character from early PMism as portrayed in the first century of the denomination's own literature, although it aroused more ferocious opposition than in most other areas.

Construction of a historical narrative was not the only theme to arise from the primary sources, for they also supply ample evidence of the inner world and ethos of the members, their beliefs, aspirations and experiences. Too much repetition would be required to set out history and ethos separately, for they are closely interwoven, and the historical chapter often yields insight into that ethos. It soon became apparent that certain features were prominent. Seven principal ones have attracted much scholarly and popular comment, and are the focus of Chapters 6-7, in which the evidence of primary sources is brought to bear upon a range of writings.

Character and Use of Evidence

The major part of the evidence deployed in support of the hypothesis is drawn from primary sources in order to demonstrate wherein they either confirm or gainsay secondary comment. In six topics, the primary sources confirm the external facts but challenge the critiques which writers have put upon those facts. Negative comment on the many areas of overlap with residual folk religion, the highly charged emotion of the religion, emphasis on Hell, and distasteful legalism, and on the other hand positive panegyric on early heroism and achievement, and approval of the use of female preachers in a male-dominated age, is consistently based on genuine facts, confirmed from primary sources, but the thesis challenges, complements or otherwise corrects common interpretations placed upon those facts. In the case of early Primitive involvement in radical political activism, the evidence consists first of a complete absence of instances of such activity in primary material, secondly of official connexional prohibition of it, and thirdly of widespread documentation of such activity 65 years after the rise of PMism except in one small *sui generis* location. Thus, Chapter 7D shows that writers confuse much later Primitives with their religious forebears.

The basis for challenging scholarly comment in Chapter 6A regards not facts but philosophy. It is argued that writers openly reveal their personal prejudices as if these were indubitably true. This dissertation accepts current theory that the PMs' internal world of faith and experience is not susceptible to external validation by an autonomous standard of objective truth, and the chapter argues that some scholars cannot be justified in writing as if their naturalistic metanarratives enjoy such validation.

The emic approach, which seeks to read the secondary comment through early Primitive eyes, enables and enhances the correction of critical distortions and leads towards a more faithful construction and appreciation of the religion. Thus, the narrative chapter grows beyond a chronicle of events and personalities into a body of evidence for the sevenfold hypothesis in the chapters which follow.

Hostile secondary writing, mentioned in the Literature Review and critiqued in chapters 6 and 7B, is valuable for its inbuilt scepticism, and helpful in confirming the course of events and other matters.

Contemporary Publications

Many of the beliefs and practices encountered in the period were set in the lifetime of the Wesleys. Wesley's teaching was the root of all the later developments which come into this study and his practice of open-air, itinerant preaching was followed. His brother Charles's hymns, sung as prayers and praise by multitudes, verify the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Morris (1967:127) points out that the 1824 hymnbook included 250 hymns by Charles Wesley. Frequent reference is therefore made to the writings of the Wesley brothers.

Players and eye-witnesses are allowed to speak for themselves, with a view to establishing a connection between today's reader and the first generation of Hampshire PMs. By this means it was possible to achieve a sense of the flavour of the movement.

Thomas Church's 351-page *Popular Sketches of Primitive Methodism* (1850 London, UK: Church) describes features which distinguished PMs from their Wesleyan brethren, with chapters on PM founders, origin, doctrines, discipline, worship, character, missions, persecutions, literature, success, defence, duty and designs. It has contributed significantly to Chapter 4A. Also, Parrott (1866), PM minister 1831-68, articulates the beliefs and policies of the movement.

Edward Miall (1809-81), Congregational minister and Member of Parliament 1852-7 and 1860-74, in *The British Churches in Relation to the People* (1849), provides a long description of the deep class divisions obtaining at the time in English villages, which is extracted in *Nonconformity in the nineteenth Century* edited by David M. Thompson (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, UK, 1972:141-3). In Miall's undated pamphlet *The Church in the Villages*, relations between the agricultural population and the Established Church are described at length. These writings are used in Chapter 3D on relations with the Church of England.

Major contributions to an impression of the character of early PMism in Hampshire were derived from the long and frequent extracts from preachers' manuscript journals which were published in the Magazine until 1845. These may be deemed reliable, as they were published soon after the events which they record and distributed nationally. If they had contained obvious falsehoods, they would have been quickly discredited. The Magazine also contains reports and articles on chapel openings and anniversaries, informative obituaries, and articles and correspondence on themes which arise in the course of the discussion, such as temperance or revivalism.

The Magazine, by publishing so many local accounts from Hampshire, integrated the Hampshire mission and circuits more tightly into the national movement and confirmed its homogeneity with the wider movement.

In January 1843 John Flesher became editor, after Hugh Bourne relinquished the post. It is not possible to know to what extent the change led to a change of style in reporting, accelerating the impression of the change of ethos noticeable from the mid-1840s.

The 1824 hymnbook not only shows what the PMs sang, and, it may be assumed, believed, but also carries an 11-page Preface which gives a range of detailed information about the meetings of the movement which this thesis draws on in a number of places. The book was issued under the name of Hugh Bourne, whose energy and personality, as one of the founders of the connexion, were a main influence in its character and development throughout the period of this study.

Biographies

The various lives written in the Victorian era tend to have an adulatory flavour, and have contributed to establishing the chronology of the movement, the character of its personnel, a sense of its ethos derived from first-hand experience or acquaintance, and awareness of the hagiography.

Russell's 1886 biography of John Ride, who led the work connected with northern Hampshire from Brinkworth, Shefford and Reading from 1828 till 1844, was serialised in the Magazine, with copious reference to Ride's Journal. The biography of Elizabeth Smith (which she began, and which was completed by Russell, her husband) was published in 1838, and Russell's autobiography in 1869; both were reissued in 2005 by Tentmaker Publications, Stoke-on-Trent.

Pritchard's 1867 biography of Richard Jukes supplied further information and insights. Jukes may never have preached in Hampshire, but as he was stationed in the Brinkworth Circuit 1828-9 the biography sheds light on the kind of personnel and ministry which led directly to the Berkshire and Hampshire missions. Jukes was born at Clungunford in 1804, which forms one of the many links between the PMs in Shropshire and Hampshire. He had a very limited education as a youngster (Magazine 1868:100), worked in early manhood as a stonemason, and was converted at the age of 20 through PM evangelism.

Dorricott's 1878 biography of William Peacefull was informative. Dorricott (1840-1929) was a PM minister from 1865 and was personally acquainted with Peacefull, stayed in Peacefull's home and was related to his father. Dorricott says that he "had his birth in a lowly place" where the inhabitants "were mainly poor, chiefly miners and farm labourers" - Trench, Shropshire, which had probably no more than 200 inhabitants. His father was a shoemaker, and the family knew "severe and pinching times", often having only two meals in a day, potatoes and salt for breakfast, and bread soaked in warm water seasoned with salt for their later meal. Their circumstances obliged Peacefull to work from an early age. Magazine (1878:626) adds that he occasionally attended school till the age of 10, and was converted in 1832 through PM preaching. He was stationed in the Wallingford Branch of the Shefford Circuit 1834-7, and although he may never have preached within Hampshire, he was one of the same circuit team as the Hampshire pioneers. Knowledge of him thus sheds a good deal of light on the character of the mission in that part of the country, and he forms yet another link with Shropshire.

Herbert's biography of Isaac Septimus Nullis (two editions, 1870, 1888) was also worthy of attention, as Herbert was one of the executors of Nullis's will, and, according to the 1888 edition (pages 123-6), saw him frequently during his last illness. Converted in Berkshire in 1850, by 1855 he was preaching in northern Hampshire villages.

The Journals of William Clowes were relevant in view of his personal friendship with John Ride. Published in London in 1844, they were re-issued in 2006 in Stoke-on-Trent by Tentmaker Publications. The 1892 revised edition of Antliff's *Life of Hugh Bourne* runs to well over 300 pages and incorporates "a considerable number of new facts gathered from reliable sources." Antliff (1813-84) became a PM minister in 1830.

Secular Sources

The main secular primary sources were the 1851 Religious Census returns for Hampshire, which have been published by the County Council, and Horace Mann's Parliamentary Report on it. It must be borne in mind, when interpreting them, that census Sunday fell in a period of unusually inclement weather and widespread illness, which most probably kept many away from their usual services. It was Mothering Sunday, when many people visited relatives, and it was the lambing season. These factors must have skewed the numbers. Further, it is not known how many attended

worship once, twice or thrice, nor how many Methodists also attended their parish church, so the number of worshippers cannot be computed. Thompson (1939:199) comments that most of the Methodists at Juniper Hill “attended church as well”. Some clergy refused to send in returns, and there appear to be serious gaps, as will be noted in the text regarding Hampshire. The census for Hampshire, edited by Vickers, supplies abundant information about meeting venues, chapel dates, morning, afternoon and evening attendances (sometimes actual, sometimes average), and signatories. The main sections used in this study are the returns for the Basingstoke, Whitchurch, Andover, and Kingsclere registration districts. Vickers (1987:xi) notes that “it is not difficult to find signs of haste or carelessness in the returns themselves, amounting often enough to errors,” but adds that “Very few nonconformist places of worship seem to have been missed.” Many societies without a chapel were recorded as meeting in private houses, but the numbers in attendance seem to be many more than could be contained in a normal home; e.g. 126 at East Sherborne [Sherborne St John], 137 at Charter Alley. It is likely that the congregation spilled over into the garden or that the service was held wholly outdoors. Furthermore, there was perhaps a temptation to make the figures as large as possible when filling in the census form. There were doubtless variations in the numbers attending services throughout the year, owing to weather, the labour required at different seasons, or the progress of the mission, and some may have entered the best figure. The Census is often seen as a solid piece of work but some statistics in the narrative in this thesis, in addition to Vickers’s comments, suggest that it is inaccurate in places. In addition, it is supposed an imbalance in perception can arise because Anglicans attended worship once and Nonconformists often attended twice and so were double counted.

The *Hampshire Chronicle* and the *Hampshire Advertiser*, on microfiche at the County Record Office, were useful for confirming the denominational accounts of the trial and imprisonment of Ride and Bishop in 1834, and at the same time offering a different perspective on the events.

Unpublished 19th century Material

John Sundius Stamp’s 1827 *History of Methodism in Hampshire*, housed at the Rylands library, consists of two thick volumes of manuscript, Volume 1 covering the years till 1791, Volume 2 1792-1804. Written in very small writing, faint in places, and hard to read in others where the handwriting deteriorates, it has no page numbers or headings, only chapters outlining the history year by year. The only places within the geographical area of this thesis about which he writes are Whitchurch (at

length) and Baughurst (tantalisingly briefly). His manuscript contributed to the preliminary overview of the Wesleyan presence in northern Hampshire.

Circuit account books, minute books and annual reports sent to connexional headquarters supply a wealth of information, including membership statistics and church discipline, which in turn lends insight into the lives, struggles and setbacks of those years. The script is not always legible, even to trained archivists; nonetheless, many scores, perhaps several hundreds, of pages served to give a clear insight into the matters which exercised members' minds and engaged their hearts. Whilst Journals and autobiographies are the work of a single author, minutes in a sense are multi-authored, for although they have only one scribe, they are normally read by all who were present and agreed as correct. Minutes also give dates, names, and financial information which can be thought to be generally correct. All this gives them a convincing reliability. It is these manuscript archives, rather than connexional publications, which give information about the less happy side of PMism: dissension, drunkenness and immorality. Furthermore, whilst it is acknowledged that a cunning scribe can skew the record in ways which conceal or distort the intention of a meeting, the vast majority of the minute books consist of brief notes of resolutions and the circumstances which prompted them, with little comment such as would betray a personal or corporate bias. Where such bias is discernible, as during the troubles in Silchester chronicled in Chapter 5C, attention is drawn to it and a critique is attempted. At both Winchester and Reading, all extant minute books from the four circuits (Shefford, Mitcheldever, Andover, Reading) were consulted, and reports compiled annually or triennially in March were consulted till 1853 so as to cover the whole of 1852. It is acknowledged (as Sheard (1980) also observes) that there may have been a temptation for ministers or circuits to exaggerate or reduce membership figures, in order to enhance reputations or to minimise the impact of a possible decrease in the following year, in a period when numerical increase was interpreted as confirmation of divine blessing.

Circuit Plans were used heavily, although it is rather random which have survived and their information is thus sporadic. Most helpfully they give much information about where the movement had spread for both Sunday services and mid-week meetings, as well as additional details concerning local or travelling preachers, prayer leaders, and other meetings such as the later "protracted meetings" of the revivalist period.

Other circuit and chapel records, such as centenary leaflets, chapel histories, and licences registering houses or chapels as places of worship, are at Winchester and Reading, and provided supplementary information, such as the identity of signatories or the social status of occupants.

There is also some indirect access to hostile primary sources, inasmuch as the words and actions of opposers such as magistrates, clergy, and landowners, are often recorded in the PM literature. This kind of information has its own value, and also serves to enable triangulation with other internal PM sources. When pro-PM and anti-PM materials give substantially the same picture of events, confidence in the historicity of those events grows.

Wesleyan and PM Minutes of Conference set local events into a more formal context and verify their dates and accuracy; they contain biographical information in obituaries, decisions regarding payment, meetings, sartorial regulations, doctrines. The Wesleyan Atlas published about 1872 illustrated the spread of Wesleyanism in the area two decades after the close of the period.

Critical Handling of Sources

It was important to ensure that the reading of primary and secondary sources was not only exhaustive and accurate, but also critical. The academic theses have already been critiqued by the academy, and this dissertation is thus drawing on a great deal of material that has previously passed through that process. Information or theories derived from dissertations can therefore be treated as having already been tested by the process of supervision and examination. This dissertation has sought to compare, contrast, triangulate and check both the primary sources and the secondary sources listed in the Literature Review, which in turn led to suspicion of received opinion and critical discussion regarding the seven seemingly most frequent areas of academic and popular comment which fills Chapters 6-7. The primary sources, being, in their raw form, uninterpreted by later academic enquiry, are for this reason set against each other and against subsequent writings as a way of cross-checking to eliminate the bias of hagiography, disapproval or theoretically driven selectivity or perspective.

Where secondary sources chronicle events in different counties, it is assumed that the writers' research was competent. No *prima facie* cause to doubt them was apparent.

In the sections on legalism and feminism, evaluative critique takes Wesley and the Bible as the yardstick against which PMism is measured, for those were the sources from which the PMs professed to derive their beliefs and practices. It will be argued that they deviated from their own chosen standards.

Hampshire homogeneous with the national Movement

In order to establish, from Hampshire, the hypothesis that early PMism has been widely misrepresented, it was necessary to prove its homogeneity with the wider national movement. Factors creating homogeneity included the 1824 hymnbook with its long descriptive and prescriptive introduction, itinerancy, by which ministers were moved from place to place every two years, often to places distant from their previous stations, and the nationally distributed *Magazine*. The annual Conference, first held in 1820, drew delegates from all Districts, and decided and imposed doctrines, regulations, and the geographical stationing of ministers for the entire movement. Doctrinal dissension was a rare event throughout the connexion, guarded against by the strict eye that was kept on the preachers' teaching. All of these receive frequent reference in this dissertation. In addition, the Founders of the movement, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, were personally in touch with ministers or ministry in Hampshire, as shown in Chapter 5A.

Early histories (Petty (1880), Kendall (ca 1908), Ritson (1911)), make no mention of differing practice or ethos between regions. Furthermore, there is an absence of suggestion in later histories which, it might be thought, look back with the clearer vision of hindsight, that the movement had not the same character everywhere. Doctoral theses consisting of regional studies (Morris (1967) Nottinghamshire, Sheard (1980) Cheshire and Lancashire, Ambler (1984) Lincolnshire, Vickers (1987) southern Hampshire, Hatcher (1993) Hull, and Truss (2015?) Yorkshire Wolds), all point to the wide congruency of the movement, as does Johnson (1989) in his study of PMism's life and experience.

As a further safeguard against the possibility that the Hampshire movement was in some way *sui generis*, and therefore unsuitable for shedding light on the wider early movement, a study of similar archival material at Shrewsbury and Chester county record offices was made of two Shropshire circuits (Prees Green, Oswestry) and one Cheshire circuit (Chester) for the same period, and this united with the theses, books and articles to confirm the homogeneity which obtained between

Hampshire and other areas of England and Wales, with the exception of the Durham mining community as argued in Chapter 7D. This part of the original research also provided ample opportunity to compare the work in Wessex with events in its county of immediate origin, namely Shropshire.

Missing Sources

The movement operated mainly among agricultural labourers, who had little or no formal education, and many of whom, including trustees of chapels, were unable to write their own names. Many therefore left no written record of their inner life and thought, and there is little first-hand access to their world view and experiences. Nonetheless, there is consistent second-hand access in the above-listed primary sources, which refer to their deeds and spoken words.

Epistemology: reaching the World of Hampshire 1830-52

The thesis assumes that the early PMs genuinely believed the message they professed, and its evaluations are based on this assumption. It takes the PMs' religion seriously, not deeming it *a priori* a false or detrimental philosophy, nor exploring it solely in terms other than their own, which would fail to achieve the purposes of the study. It aims for an appreciation of the world of beliefs, perceptions and emotions of early Hampshire PMs, and views their writings and sayings as granting access to those thoughts and sentiments.

In contrast to the Enlightenment, which coincided with the rise of empirical science and enthroned reason, post-modernity is characterised by a view that truth is unknowable and that multiple viewpoints are all equally valid: the truth is not within reach, and the concept of truth may be jettisoned in favour of the authenticity or validity of individual points of view, the exaltation of pluralism, devaluing of reason, personal rather than universal truth, and agnosticism about historical knowledge. Past facts cannot be accurately known, only interpretations and responses read into events by those who wrote about them afterwards; the past is inaccessible, and access is open only to people's imperfect perceptions distorted by their personal outlook and purposes. Every perspective is interpretation, none is susceptible to external validation, and all are equally admissible. Chapter 6 appeals selectively to this theory in challenging the obloquy which various

writers direct towards PM ‘superstition’, ‘hysteria’ and ‘obsession’ with hell, and juxtaposes the PMs’ interpretation of those issues beside derogatory interpretations, in the belief that the PMs’ perspective and stance is as admissible as their detractors’, who sometimes write from the unverifiable assumptions of their own decade or perspectives. When the thesis challenges scholars’ critiques of PM belief in divine intervention and of the intense emotions aroused by PM preaching, the argument draws on insights articulated by Jean-François Lyotard concerning the inadequacy of appeals to a rational external independent authority for validation and the validity of alternative hermeneutics.

However, Postmodernism does not drive all aspects of the dissertation; rather, when tracing events, it urges with E. H. Carr (*What is History?* in Hughes-Warrington (2000:26)) that historiography should steer a careful course “between the Scylla of an untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts, of the unqualified primacy of fact over interpretation, and of the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian.” Whilst all historiography must be interpretive, the view in this dissertation regarding the primary sources is positivist, in contrast to the theory of Jacques Derrida: a faithful appraisal of the movement is within reach of the research. In N. T. Wright’s words, “We really do have access to the past; granted, we see it through our own eyes, and our eyes are culturally conditioned to notice some things and not others. But they really do notice things, and provided we keep open the conversation with other people who look from other perspectives, we have a real, and not illusory, chance of finding out more or less what really happened”¹⁴. The records provide an opportunity to construct a picture of the lives and ministry of the early PMs which, though not offering a complete picture of their daily or annual lives, accords with the events and experiences which they wrote about. They were not writing in consciously or unconsciously coded semiotics: they were recording events and experiences from which a faithful picture of the movement and its ethos can be built up. When they employ Methodist, Evangelical or Victorian phraseology, their intentions are not hard to penetrate for one familiar with the semantics of the subculture they inhabited.

A further reason not to discount the primary sources is their close accord with many accounts of revival times written in different languages, centuries and countries. Bebbington (2012:262, 274-5) adduces certain common characteristics of revivals: prayerful expectation; temperance; music; spontaneity combined with planning; external opposition; excitement; leaders who value education;

14 *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London, UK: SPCK, 2005:82)

a disproportionate part played by the laity; significant input by women; conversions largely among the young; a large number of conversions from outside the churches; reinvigoration of believers; emphasis on the Bible, the Cross, conversion, and activism. There being so many well documented witnesses to these elements in revival, there seems no cause to question their veracity in the Hampshire of the 1830s to 1840s.

If a preacher describes a service in words like “the power of God fell upon the meeting”, whilst this dissertation does not dispute the classical providential understanding of revival, an understanding of the kind of shared experience which the preacher is describing does not require a sceptic to believe in divine power, but rather to understand that the preacher is denoting a certain kind of event which the investigator can conceive.

As Bebbington (1990) argues, such positivist epistemology believes that the evidence of primary sources can point to credible conclusions; that written statements can correspond with reality; that a faithful picture of the past is accessible. This does not overlook the fact that the record is incomplete, or that the past cannot be directly observed, or that primary sources can be misleading. Distortion caused by the unavoidable bias which any writer must bring to historiography can be reduced by due attention to the cumulative weight of evidence, the balance of probabilities, and the deployment of critical thought. Insistence that a range of statements must cohere before a faithful portrayal of the past is to be achieved does not negate a positivist epistemology, but rather the two can both be brought into play in striving for the appreciation of an independent past reality. Bebbington calls this a perspective theory of historiography: history resulting from interaction between the historian’s personal judgement and the evidence. The historiographical principles which lie behind the narrative (Chapter 5) in this thesis are consistent with those cited here from the writings of Carr, Wright and Bebbington.

The method of inquiry is *inductive*: *leading into* the hypothesis. It did not start from a theory concerning early PMism and seek to prove it: that is, it is not *deductive*, *leading from* the thesis to the phenomena. The methodology sought to discover from primary sources the chronology, geography, people and ethos of the movement, before comparing its findings with Victorian and later generalisations and comment in popular and academic writing.

Use of quotations

The emic approach, defined in the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) as an approach to the description of a culture in terms of its internal elements rather than in terms of an existing external scheme, supplies a strong rationale for including the selected extracts found in the thesis and aims to achieve “the mental inhabitation of primary sources” (to borrow a phrase from Alister McGrath). In attempting to discover, narrate and describe the characters, ministries and beliefs of the main players, and the ethos of the movement and of its congregations - in order, as it were, to see the movement through their eyes - major characters relate events in their own words, with quotations from journals, letters, reports and articles composed by them. It is from their own writings, or the testimony of those who knew them personally, that the reader is best able to come to an understanding and a feel of what sort of men and women these were, what they achieved, how they did it, and to what extent they are appropriately or erroneously portrayed by others. This methodological decision is intended to give weight to the outlook and opinions of the Methodists and to attempt to understand their situation from their point of view. Although other points of view are presented, all of them are, to a measure, dependent on the primary actors who are the focus of this dissertation. To put this another way, it has been argued that:

*any historical account must be recognisable by its original participants. This axiom, like all axioms, cannot be proved, but if it is rejected, we assume that the interpretation of primary sources ... may legitimately be alien to the providers of primary sources. ... Thus the failure to preserve some connection between source and interpretation is essentially a distortion of the source.*¹⁵

Therefore wherever possible and appropriate, the thoughts of the Methodists are expressed in their own words or thought patterns, in the belief that the previously largely unexplored primary sources convey a faithful impression of the movement. This accords (*mutatis mutandis*) with the Open University’s June 2012 project entitled *Building on History: Religion in London*, which focused on the Black Majority Church:

Perhaps the most poignant messages of this workshop were that “*no one can tell your story like you can*”, and “*if you do not write your own history, then there is danger that others will write it for you.*” Indeed, if the history and heritage of the Black Majority Church is not

15 William K. Kay (1992) *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, Vol. XI, p. 59

effectively explored and preserved by its own community, the space left remains open to myths, hearsay and the prejudicial views of others.

Thematic Limits

Several writers have supplied a narrative of PMism's spread from Staffordshire to Wessex, and nothing was needed in this thesis beyond a brief summary from secondary literature.

Whilst other writers might have selected a different range of major themes emerging from a comparison of the primary and secondary literature, the themes selected here for discussion seemed the most salient for achieving the purpose of modifying unbalanced or incorrect popular and academic portrayals. Sunday Schools, in which secular subjects as well as religious were taught, became an important feature of Methodist life. However, as OLD says, "PM regulations discouraged the teaching of reading and writing on the Lord's Day. A move in 1832 to form a PM Sunday School Union came to nothing until unions were formed in the Leeds District in 1857 and connexionally in 1874." Sunday Schools, together with other ministry amongst children and young people, could be the focus of a discrete thesis. They do not come within this study.

The research for this thesis has not sought to establish by means of original discovery that PMism was a working-class movement. This has been repeatedly established by a wide range of writers. Several studies of fathers' occupations in baptismal records have demonstrated that PMism reached mainly the working class. Morris (1967), Sheard (1980) Dews (1984), Vickers (1987), Ambler (1989), Johnson (1989), Hatcher (1993), Watts (1995), Kitching (2001), Garratt (2002), Tiller (2006), Borrett (2008), Calder (2012) all refer to analyses of PM baptismal records. They all arrive at the conclusion that PMism was largely a working-class movement. It was not deemed necessary to repeat this exercise.

Another area of possible research which has not been pursued is the matter of where PMs got married during the period. Despite the opposition of many Anglican clergy to the spread of Dissent, no reference was found in either primary or secondary literature to difficulty with nuptials, either before or after the Marriage Act of 1836, and it does not appear to have been an issue in the inner or outer life of the movement.

Theories regarding political, economic and social circumstances which formed the background to PM expansion in Hampshire, and contributed to it, are summarised in the Literature Review. These

are mainly Hobsbawm (1959), Currie (1967), Thompson (1968) and Everitt (1972). They are not central to the contribution this thesis makes to knowledge in its search for the events and ethos in Hampshire and their conformity to portrayals in other literature, and therefore these writers' theories intrude only marginally into the critical analysis.

Secondary Literature

Following (and to some extent concurrently with) immersion in the primary sources, by extensive reading it became apparent that almost all secondary sources impart a distorted or at best partial sense of the inner world of the early PMs. Some writers are undisguisedly hostile; some lean too far towards adulation; some re-shape the early PMs into an image each writer prefers; some, dealing only with externals, do not penetrate the experience and motivation of the pioneers and members.

The task was to bring the findings from primary sources into dialogue with both scholarly and popular comment on the movement, in the period and in comparable rural areas, in order to construct a more faithful interpretation of the material. A process of triangulation brought the work of scholars into dialogue with the self-understandings of the Methodists, comparing and contrasting both with the impressions which emerged from the *tabula rasa* reading of primary sources. In the critical engagement with the secondary sources, reference is made to hostile, favourable and impartial writing. Hostile criticism helped identify what strikes observers as salient characteristics, particularly the motifs of legalism, emotionalism, and the eternal punishment of those who die in unbelief. This triangulation led to the birth of the hypothesis of the dissertation, namely, that early PMism has frequently been misrepresented by both admirers and detractors.

Secondary Literature as Primary Sources

The evolution of the thesis progressed from discovery of the events, character and persons of the movement to the question of the extent to which that first generation of Hampshire PMs conformed to contemporary and later stereotypes and generalisations. The stereotypes and depictions were discovered in the writings of novelists, historians, theologians, ministers, academics, and biographers, and thus much of what began as secondary reading developed into primary source material in the search for those portrayals.

Novels are a major way in which the caricatures are implanted in the public's mind. Examples, mainly unfavourable, were found during the reading of Cunningham (1975), others by searching the texts of novels on the Internet, and others from personal reading of a wide range of genres and publication dates. Hostile portrayals of Methodists were discovered in novels published as late as 2012, but the methodological decision was taken to cite only novelists born before 1852.

Biographers and early historians of PMism supplied many examples of the panegyrics of the early movement and its pioneers. No time limit was set for these, a major purpose of the thesis being to correct received hagiography.

Chronological Limits

The question of when to begin the study (other than setting the background) was easy: the movement reached the area in 1830. When to conclude was a more difficult decision, because the material threatened to become unwieldy if continued too far into the future. But there were pointers, for a number of historians have composed remarkably similar periodisations of the movement, as adumbrated in the Literature Review. As further evidence of this watershed, in 1853 Basingstoke became the head of the originally Mitcheldever Circuit. This all pointed to 1852 as an appropriate terminus for the study.

A note is needed on the matter of chronology. There is often a discrepancy of one year in different sources between dates given for such events as the formation of circuits or appointment of ministers. In many instances this discrepancy seemed to be because the decision was made in one year, and implemented the next, perhaps at December and March Quarterly Meetings.

Geographical Limits

A rational decision was required about how to limit the geographical area for this study, by balancing a variety of considerations. Early circuits were of immense extent, with many data, and the circuits which appear in this narrative reached from the New Forest to the Surrey border, and from Berkshire into Wiltshire. This becomes unmanageable. Consequently, the study looks no further *west* or *south* than Andover, fixing upon the OS easting 36 and northing 44 (sheet 185) as the boundaries of the study. To the *east* the decision excluded places now included in the Hart

administrative district of Hampshire, hard by the Surrey border, making easting 72 the limit. To the *north* the county boundary is the limit. These parameters mean that the thesis is mainly concerned with the present-day Basingstoke and Deane district.

This choice was not wholly arbitrary. In the west, Andover was chosen because it was the root of much Methodism in northern Hampshire; and to have extended further east would have linked the area too closely with the work in Surrey and have threatened to render the thesis amorphous; further south trespasses on the already existing work of Vickers (1987) and Sharp (1990-2007).

There are nonetheless two exceptions to this limitation:

- Some inconsistency is permitted in the use of phrase “county boundary”, as it has wandered somewhat between the years of this study and the present day, and not every place is still in the same county. Changes are noted in the text.
- Micheldever, despite lying some three miles to the south of the chosen area, was the root of much of the PMism within the area itself, and thus demands close attention. From the early work centred on Micheldever (spelled *Mitcheldever* in the 19th century and here in quotations and titles) the movement reached northwards to the Basingstoke area, till eventually Basingstoke became the head of the circuit. For this reason, to omit the early work in Micheldever would be to cut the later Basingstoke movement away from its root, making it seem as if it appeared *ex nihilo*. Without Micheldever, it would be impossible to understand Basingstoke

This eventually led to the Newbury, Andover, Reading and Basingstoke Circuits.

The Text

It seemed that the best order in which to present the material was first a study of the personalities, events and ethos discovered from primary sources, then the comparison with writings from the movement’s admirers and detractors.

The term *revival* is used many times throughout the dissertation with the sense of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in an area, a sense in which many writers, including Bebbington, employ it. The work of reviving languishing churches is often called *revivalism* in the text.

Quotations are printed as in the original. The convention of inserting *[sic]* after archaic or erroneous spellings has not been adopted, but rather the alternative convention of preserving original spellings

and archaisms. Likewise, the convention of capitalising within square brackets the first letter of a word beginning, in the original, in lower case has not been followed: quotations are printed as in their originals.

PMs' beliefs are illumined by reference to the Bible with which they were familiar, quotations being taken from the 1611 King James translation.

More attention is devoted to Micheldever and Silchester than to most other places. They present contrasting aspects of the PM movement. In Micheldever is seen "the power and the glory", advance and success; in Silchester a troubled society struggling, not always successfully, with the dilemmas which attend human weakness and failings.

Justification of the Thesis

The Literature Review exposed gaps and imbalance in accounts of PMism, which it is important to correct. A number of reasons suggest themselves:

- The absence of any connected narrative of the coming of Methodism to northern Hampshire was needed as a contribution to historical knowledge.
- PMism embraced a considerable number of people, and it behoves observers, including historians, theologians or novelists, not to misrepresent them, either in ways to which they cannot match up, or by depicting them in an unjustifiably hostile manner.
- PMism was a prolonged and powerful working-class movement which reached many parts of Britain, and a faithful account of it is a necessity for an appreciation of the Victorian age.
- Writers, especially Methodist authors, over the past eight decades have progressively distanced themselves from the beliefs and ethos of PMism and portrayed them as either passé or minatory. Concurrently, Methodism, and the Church more widely, has entered seemingly irreversible decline. It may be that there is much to ponder, and perhaps to learn and recapture, from a time when the religion was thriving.
- An uncritical admiration for any movement or group of people is likely to lead to a repetition of its blemishes and errors. These need to be exposed, not with scorn or animosity, but with sympathy and due credit towards wider achievements.

- Of all the doctoral theses dealing with PMism, only Johnson (1989) makes it his express purpose to discover its ethos in an emic manner, but he does not pursue this into correcting depictions offered by other writers. It seemed good to repeat the attempt for a different part of England, and to extend it to a critique of popular and academic portrayals of the inner world of PMism.
- Unexplored areas which demand further research are identified in the thesis, and it is hoped that this will point to further contributions to knowledge and debate.

CHAPTER 3:

NATIONAL AND LOCAL BACKGROUND

The social and religious backgrounds combined to create a volatile context in northern Hampshire, into which PMism flowed. This chapter looks at the secular background, beginning with a depiction of life and conditions in the villages, then looks briefly at the towns, especially Basingstoke which features frequently in the thesis. Social discontent and disturbances, including cholera, then become the focus, and finally the nationwide PM constituency and membership. It then moves on to the Wesleyan, Dissenting and Anglican aspects of the background.

A: SOCIAL

The Countryside

The eighteenth century Industrial Revolution had little impact on south-western England. In the period studied here, Hampshire remained rural and agricultural with an almost total absence of industry. Page (1912, 1973:493ff) describes Hampshire as having chalk hills over its greater part, heath in the east and the New Forest in the south. A northern area has intractable soil difficult to work without draining and chalking. A central region has clay hilltops, chalk hillsides, and alluvial soil in the valleys. There was fine fertile soil around Basingstoke, and much sheep, corn and fallows to the west. Farms varied greatly in size, with little cattle breeding and few dairies, the chief products being wheat, sheep and barley.

The labourers endured inflated prices and heavy taxation during the French wars of 1793-1815. Prices fell when peace came. The greatest distress fell on arable rather than grassland, and many farmers faced ruin, leaving farms deserted and labourers wandering in search of work. Agriculture remained depressed for the next twenty years.

Cobbett, writing in 1822 concerning Hampshire, Berkshire, Surrey and Sussex, says: "These counties are purely agricultural, and they have suffered most cruelly from ... the luxurious,

effeminate, tax-eating crew, who never come near them, and who have pared them down to the very bone.” In 1825 and 1826 he wrote, at Hurstbourne Tarrant:

We came through a village called Woodcote, and another, called Binley. I never saw any inhabited places more recluse than these. ... Poor, half-starved wretches of Binley! The hand of taxation, the collection for the sinecures and pensions, must fix its nails even in them, who really appeared too miserable to be called by the name of people. ... These poor creatures, that I behold here, pass their lives amidst flocks of sheep; but never does a morsel of mutton enter their lips. ... I have, in no part of England, seen the labouring people so badly off as they are here.

Binley features repeatedly in the narrative of this thesis. Hobsbawm and Rudé (1969:85-6) record:

The harvest of 1828 was poor, though the winter was mild; the harvest of 1829 was worse, and not gathered in till the snow was already on the barn in early October. ... The labourers must have faced the spring of 1830 with the memory of cold, hunger and unemployment... If we can put ourselves into the skins of labourers in the early autumn of 1830 ... we can imagine the tense pessimism with which they confronted the hard part of the year.

Life was again afflicted when a very cold summer in 1848 ruined many crops.

A tithe of produce was given to support of the parish clergy. Its value was reduced by the slump following the Napoleonic wars, and the clergy pressurised farmers to maintain it. Simultaneously, the landed gentry pressurised the farmers, as their tenants, to maintain the level of rent, which they were able to pay only by keeping labourers' wages low.

Enclosures contributed significantly to the misery, though their complex implementation lies beyond the scope of this study. In *A Guide to Enclosure in Hampshire 1790-1900*, the authors¹⁶ list enclosure of fields or commons in many villages which feature in this thesis: Basing, Baughurst, Burghclere, Oakley, Dummer, Ecchinswell, Faccombe, Hurstbourne Priors, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Ibthorpe, Kingsclere, Linkenholt, Longparish, Micheldever, Mortimer West End, Newnham, Pamber, Rotherwick, Saint Mary Bourne, Binley, Swampton, Sherborne St John, Monk Sherborne, Silchester, Steventon, Tadley, Vernham Dean, North Waltham, Wolverton, East Woodhay, Wootton St Lawrence.

¹⁶ Chapman & Seeliger (1997: Hampshire County Council, Winchester, UK)

Further insight is gained from an article by Rev. W. Rowe in the PM *Aldersgate Magazine* 1900:701-2 entitled “Condition of the agricultural Labourer”, in which he looks back to his time in Andover in the mid 1840s:

As a rule he was housed as no gentleman would house his horses or dogs. Comfort as understood by not a few of us was unknown to him. His wages were a mere pittance - scarcely enough with what his wife and children might earn in the summer, to keep him and them from starvation. In the winter his physical condition was most deplorable. ... Meat, as an article of diet, was unknown to him as a rule. When he did get any, it consisted of a bit of fat and rusty bacon. It is only fair to say that some of his employers by gifts of food helped him to eke out a mere existence, but those who did so were few and far between. As a class he was most illiterate. Numbers could neither read nor write. If schools did exist here and there, he and his fellows derived little benefit from them, for at a very early age they were compelled to go to work that they might earn fourpence or sixpence a week - a sum, small as it was, that added to the family capital.

Edward Bishop reported concerning Hampshire that¹⁷: “The gentry, clergy, and gentlemen farmers formed one class of society; and shepherds, woodmen, ploughmen, &c., another. ... between them was a great chasm, ... Between the farmer and his labourer the distance was almost incredible.”

Kendall¹⁸ (ca 1908:I:213) comments:

Amongst the many causes of this wide-spread misery must be named the long war and the legacy it left of crushing debt and national exhaustion; the passing in 1815 of the iniquitous Corn Law; the wholesale enclosures of the common lands that had gone on during the war-time; the heavy taxation; the succession of bad harvests and the dearness of provisions; the abuses of a corrupt and expensive government. ... the far-reaching effects of the industrial revolution.

These conditions led to a chronic sense of need among the rural poor, creating fruitful ground for the message brought by the early PMs.

17 Petty (1880:332)

18 Volume 1, Chapter III

Towns

Here are population figures, from the decennial censuses, of the principal settlements. Prior to 1831 such data are non-existent or unreliable, though figures will be cited for some parishes.

	1801	1831	1851
ANDOVER	3304	4748	5187
BASINGSTOKE	2589	3581	4263
OVERTON	1130	1507	1550
WHITCHURCH	1275	1673	1911 ¹⁹

Basingstoke, at the centre of a rich agricultural area, was a small town with no manufacture but markets to which people came from as far as Andover, Winchester, Newbury and Reading. Its main business was corn and malt. A canal transported goods to London; rail links with Southampton and London were built during the period of this thesis; and the town, as the centre of a network of roads, became a significant thoroughfare. By the 1830s its population and importance were increasing.

The “Temperance” Movement

According to Bettey (1987:98), “there was during the whole of the period 1500-1900 an amazing amount of drunkenness.” Information on the movement is here drawn mainly from Royle (2010). It began in the 18th century as opposition to the use of brandy and gin. Rioting, crime, and the neglect of children were seen as deriving from their abuse. By the mid 18th century, beer was being portrayed as the alternative to spirits, a temperance drink and a symbol of peace and plenty. Temperance societies were formed from the 1830s. Brewers and vintners subscribed. In 1830 the government made beer more readily available. A beer house could be opened for a 2-guinea licence, sales were restricted to beer and cider, opening hours to 4 am to 10 pm. Hundreds of new beerhouses and breweries were opened.

¹⁹ Victoria County History

Beer was integral to working class life, a token of manliness and source of nourishment. Abstention risked isolation from neighbours and friends. Moreover, Royle explains that “ale and beer were among the safer and cheaper drinks available to ordinary people”²⁰, for water and milk were unsafe, and tea and coffee were expensive (Watts (1995:211)).

The first national teetotal organisation was formed in 1835 and soon marginalised the anti-spirits movement. Ward (1972:289-91) comments that “Teetotalism, as distinct from temperance, had originated as a piece of working-class self-help, a moral or religious programme from below, ... Those communions which had a powerful stake in working-class religion and especially the Roman Catholics and the Primitive Methodists, soon responded.”

Social Disturbances

Following the American war of independence (1775-83), the French Revolution (1789-99), the Luddite riots (1812), and the Peterloo Massacre (1819), the English Establishment felt nervous concerning the possibility of popular uprisings. The so-called Six Acts were passed to suppress radical reform and large meetings convened for the purpose. 1830 is particularly significant, being the year the PMs entered Hampshire, the year agitation preceding the Reform Act of 1832 began, and the year of the Swing Riots. Selbie (1908:199) wrote that reaction was in full force and Dissenters everywhere denounced as Jacobites and revolutionaries, viewed by the authorities with alarm.

The Swing Riots of 1830

A widespread uprising began among agricultural labourers in Kent in the summer of 1830. Kent (1997:1-3) relates that “Hampshire was engulfed by a wave of rural protest” in November 1830. By December the troubles, focusing on low wages, tithes, workhouses and the Poor Law, had spread across southern England and East Anglia. Heath (1893) wrote:

Left in ignorance so dense that probably not one in five could read or write, was it surprising that the agricultural labourers should view the introduction of threshing machines as calculated to put the finishing stroke to their ruin? ... Thus, in the autumn of 1830,

²⁰ Email, 28th July, 2012

Agricultural England was panic-stricken by the news that the labourers were rising everywhere, destroying machines and setting fire to ricks. ... Night after night in many parts of England the blazing sky told that Captain Swing had been at his work.

The authorities exacted a cruel revenge: 101 Hampshire men were sentenced to death, and 117 were transported to Australia and Tasmania.

Persecution of PMs was doubtless aggravated by the Riots. Sir Thomas Baring feared radical agitation, being convinced that the cause of the Swing riots near his estate near Micheldever was “a revolutionary spirit” rather than despair and penury²¹. Sharp²² writes:

Apart from the obvious mistrust of anything new, the main reason for the violence of the opposition in Hampshire seems to have been that the Primitive Methodist missionaries chose February 1831 to start their mission, and 1830 had seen widespread unrest among rural populations in the south of England, with the worst in Hampshire occurring during November 1830. ... It is not surprising that they were looked upon with grave suspicion.

Turner (1985:85) says, “Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire witnessed much persecution by squire and parson who equated ranters with rickburners.” Vickers (1987:256) writes:

There is little doubt that the authorities were deeply suspicious of a popular movement in which working-class preachers harangued their fellows in open-air gatherings and organised their converts into tightly-knit groups - and all this in a countryside still reeling from the agricultural rioting.

Tiller (2006:98) comments that the PMs’ large gatherings led by working class men “could easily be identified by some with potential disorder and dangerous independence at a time of political and industrial activism.” Truss (Chapter 4) writes that “open-air preachers were considered dangerous radicals.”

Other Troubles and Reform

The Corn Law of 1815 kept bread expensive by hindering the cheap import of foreign grain. Farmers demanded protection after war ended in 1815, and the Law was designed to protect their

²¹ Kent (1997:14)

²² *The Primitive Methodist Mission in rural Hampshire*:12-3

wealth by prohibiting the import of corn till the home price rose to a fixed level. Bread became expensive, which in turn meant the poor could not afford other foods such as dairy and meat products. A revised Law of 1828 failed to rectify the problem, but led to surges of availability and slumps in price.

Nonconformists resented the Church Rate. Everyone was obliged to pay a locally fixed rate for the upkeep of the parish church, which forced people to support a Church from which they dissented. Outcry began towards the end of 1830, and was entangled with the wider agitation surrounding the Reform Bill preceding the Act of 1832. The Rate did not become voluntary till 1868 (Knight (2008:24)).

The Speenhamland system was a revision of the old Poor Law. Hobsbawm and Rudé (1969) explain that it encouraged farmers to pay their workers less, and workers to work as little as possible, because the system supplemented wages by relief paid out of the parish rates. Workers could neither fall below, nor rise above, the minimum subsistence level determined by the parish authorities. As productivity fell, the subsistence level was progressively lowered, especially in the years 1815-20 and 1830-5. Labourers qualified for the relief by settling for a year in the same parish, and thus were trapped in one place. They became degraded, demoralised, and increasingly dependent on poor relief.

The New Poor Laws of 1834 were an attempt to improve the system, but took some years to take effect. New workhouses were built throughout the country, places of hardship, degradation, humility, severity, “as repulsive as is consistent with humanity”²³ with a view to making their condition “more uncomfortable than that of the poorest workers outside” (Watts 1995:506), to deter people from applying unless their need was extreme. They began to fill up with the poor, and were hated. Page (1912, 1973) comments concerning the agricultural labourer in Hampshire:

it is impossible to imagine how in the middle of the nineteenth century he was content with such beggarly pay. Cottage rents were, however, higher than in other counties ... owing to the scarcity of cottages; in some parishes the landlords had pulled down all those that seemed likely to afford the poor a settlement, so great was the dread, even several years after the Poor Law Amendment Act, of having a large number of paupers to provide for.

Page adds however that Stratfield Saye, held by Duke of Wellington, was an exception, with no scarcity of cottages, well built with low rents.

²³ Wilson (2002:12) quoting H. H. Milman

By game laws it was illegal to buy, sell or kill game; netting a hare or rabbit was punishable by seven years' transportation. The years 1839-43 have been called "the hungry 'forties" due to a severe depression in trade and bad harvests, and 1845 brought a disastrously wet summer. "The years 1837-44 brought the worst economic depression that had ever afflicted the British people. It is estimated ... that more than a million paupers starved from simple lack of employment."²⁴

Vickers (1987:245-6) commented: "The spread of Primitive Methodism in the rural south coincided with a period of economic depression, social unrest and violence, against a background of desperate poverty," but adds that "The Primitive Methodist membership figures in the south for the 1830s and 40s give very little support to the theory of a positive correlation between social unrest or economic strain and religious revival." Werner (1984:170) draws the same conclusion: "depression or unemployment, such as occurred during the mid-1820s, might or might not be offset by gains" (i.e. numerical gains to the movement). The poor sometimes blame God for their hardship and hate him accordingly, and sometimes turn to him for comfort in their distress.

Cholera

Dews (1984), Werner (1984) and Hatcher (1993) mention epidemic as a factor contributing to PM growth. In 1832 more than 55,000 people died. In 1848-50 a further outbreak claimed 52,000 lives. However, *The Cholera Years*²⁵ records only 91 Hampshire deaths from cholera in 1831-2 and 1245 in 1848-9, but none in the area of this study. PM growth in the Andover Circuit reached a high point in 1849, and the Circuit quarterly meeting of September 1849 made the decision "That a Sabbath day of Thanksgiving, fasting and prayer be published on the plan, relating to our merciful preservation from the ravages of cholera." This points to a leading aspect of the ethos of the movement: belief in an active God who intervenes for his people.

The PM Constituency

PM Minutes, 1873:88, state: "No church in Great Britain is proportionately so largely connected with the working class as ours." Mann's parliamentary *Report* on the 1851 religious census

²⁴ Wilson (2002:28)

²⁵ Avery, J. (2001: Southampton, UK, Beech Books:66-72)

(1854:lxviii and clxv), concerning PMism, says: “Its sphere of operation is, however, much more exclusively among the poor; numbers of whom, no doubt, who probably would never venture to the formal meetings of the other sects, are found attending the out-door preaching or engaging in the cottage services conducted by the Primitive Methodists. ... The community whose operations penetrate most deeply through the lower sections of the people is the body called the *Primitive Methodists*.”

Taylor (1935:106), Hobsbawm (1959:136), Thompson (1968:41), Bebbington (1992:16), Selbie (1908:190), Garratt (2002:111, 116), Truss, Morris (1967:168-9), Turner (1985:39, 59), Dews (1984), and Munson (1991) all write of PM penetration of the working class. Knight (2008:13) observes that PMs “flourished best among those of more humble status ... PMs attracted agricultural labourers.” She adds that it was Congregationalists, Baptists and Wesleyans who “tended to be the main middle-class denominations.”

Kitching²⁶ states that “the early Primitives in Hampshire were either farm workers or in the towns more poorly paid industrial workers.” Vickers (1987:245) writing about central southern England says: “The first Primitive Methodists were drawn from the working classes, ... In the rural societies, where its main strength lay, the agricultural labourers as well as artisans provided much of the leadership. ... The trusts of some of the smaller Primitive Methodist chapels were composed entirely of labourers, some of whom could not even sign their names.” A comment from Thompson (1939:70) should nonetheless serve as a caution: “Some who could write their own name quite well would make a cross as signature to a document out of nervousness or modesty.”

This constituency is confirmed by studies of Hampshire baptismal registers:

Vickers (1987:421): “the baptismal register for the Mitcheldever Circuit shows a preponderance of labourers (including woodmen) and artisans (in the proportion of three to one), reflecting the humble social background of rural Primitive Methodism.”

Borrett (2008) analysed the Andover PM circuit baptismal registers in detail for 1834-9, showing a two-thirds majority of fathers entered as ‘labourer’, adding “Most parents’ signatures are signed by Minister or X. Few are signed properly.” Other professions include shoemaker, miller, carpenter, drillman, toll-gate keeper, shepherd.

²⁶ letter, 5.4.2007

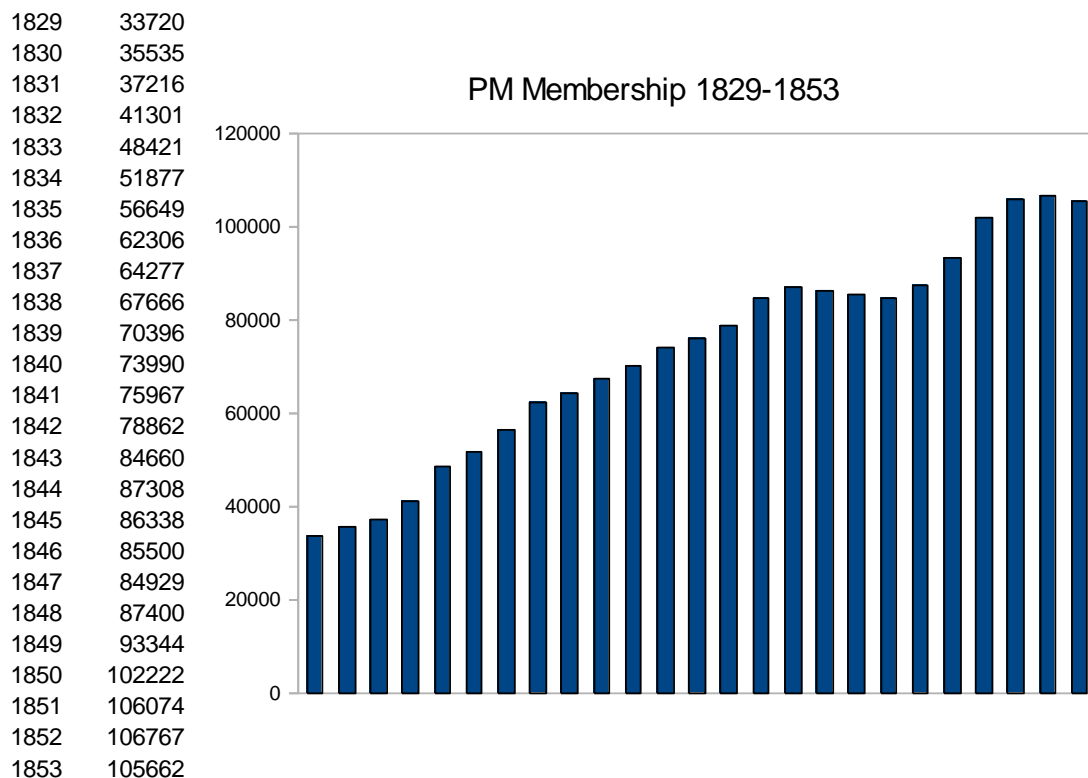
Kitching (page 5): “Certainly Methodism in the Meon Valley was a poor people’s religion.”

His study of the baptismal registers for the latter years of the 19th century show mostly farm labourers, carters, and an occasional blacksmith or shepherd.

Cobbett’s writings confirm that PMism in Hampshire attracted a large number of the agricultural poor.

National Membership

Snell and Ell (2000:135) record that PMs had over half a million attendances on census Sunday and were present in 70% of the registration districts of England and Wales. The graph shows national PM membership during the period studied here, plus one year either side.



based on statistics in Currie, Gilbert and Horsley:140-1

B: WESLEYANS

No strands of Arminian Methodism came to light in the area under consideration, except Wesleyan and Primitive. The former came in 1738 and its distribution, though meagre in comparison with later PM expansion, forms a significant part of the background. This section looks first at the Wesleyans during the lifetime of Wesley, then at the period till the close of this study, thirdly at relations between Wesleyans and PMs, and finally draws a comparison between their relative success.

THE AGE OF WESLEY, 1738-1791

Methodism's spread was greater in industrial areas and towns than in southern agricultural parishes. J H Rigg, in his introduction to Pocock (1885), wrote:

Wesley devoted his labour chiefly to districts where the population was numerous, leaving unvisited most of the purely agricultural regions of England, where the sparse peasant population, bound to their field-work, the torpid tenant farmers, the coarse squires made up a state of society which offered the fewest opportunities for his work.

Bebbington (1989:26) states that "Growing industrial areas, including the big cities, were deliberately targeted by Wesley and his contemporaries, for there dwelt the most concentrated populations." Vickers (WHS *Proceedings*, 47:90) wrote that "As late as 1791 ... there were still only a handful of Methodist societies scattered throughout Hampshire and Dorset and southern Wiltshire."

Dummer and Basingstoke

On 29th May 1738 Wesley went to Dummer, a village some five miles from Basingstoke. On the Sunday, he was *calling sinners to repentance*. He returned in March, preached to "a large and attentive congregation," and "was desired to expound in the evening at Basingstoke." Back in Basingstoke on 29th March, he "in the evening expounded to a small company." He preached there again in January 1759, when *they were unusually attentive in the evening*, and again in September

and October 1759, in 1760, 1763 and 1766. In March 1781 a store-house in Basingstoke was licensed as a place of worship, the signatories including Wesleyans Benjamin Loader and Jasper Winscom.

Whitchurch and Andover

Francis Hill, an Excise officer, introduced Methodist preachers to Whitchurch. Wesley preached in January 1759 *to a large and serious congregation*. Deveson writes²⁷ that they “within six months had adapted a stable as a permanent preaching house, where Wesley preached on his next visit in September.”

In October 1759, Wesley wrote: “I determined to try if I could do any good at Andover. The congregation at ten in the morning was small; in the evening their number was increased.” In 1760: “I preached about nine at Andover, to a few dead stones; at one in Whitchurch.”

Vickers (1987:124) writes that the earliest Methodist certificate for Andover (1761) shows John Haim as Pastor. Haime, one of Wesley’s preachers, died in Whitchurch, having overseen the flock for some time. Wesley preached at Whitchurch in 1763, 1766, 1771 and 1779. In 1780 “The preaching-house at Whitchurch, though much enlarged, could not contain the congregation in the evening.” In 1787 Jasper Winscom, an ironmonger and haberdasher in Winchester, retired to Whitchurch and led the society. When the Circuit was divided into Portsmouth and Salisbury, Whitchurch was assigned to Portsmouth. According to Ward (1995) Methodists in 1788 were numerous in Whitchurch, attending the parish church as well as Methodist meetings.

“THE METHODIST WILDERNESS”: 1792-1852

The 1820 Conference set out their ideal of a preacher’s work, described by Harrison (1932:64) as “rather that of a pastor of the flock of Christ than that of a wandering evangelist.” Vickers (1987:249) states that, when the PMs came, open-air preaching had been “almost entirely abandoned by Wesleyan itinerants, who had largely become the pastors of established congregations.” Milburn (2002:25) comments, regarding the 1820s, that the Wesleyans were “settling down into an institutional mode”.

²⁷ Deveson, (2012:4)

It is impossible to understand Wesleyan Methodism in this period without considering Jabez Bunting. Hempton (1984:205) describes him as “fearful of popular radicalism and unrestrained revivalism”. Hylson-Smith (1998:118-9) explains:

1833 dawned for the Wesleyan Methodists with one man pre-eminent and exercising a rule which was to last to the middle of the century. Jabez Bunting ... drew his strength from his administrative ability. ... By his control over major committees he could determine Conference decisions. ... and he so dominated it that there was no threat to his iron grip.

...he demanded for the Conference an authority which was not dissimilar to that of papal sovereignty. ... Such a view ... tended ... to set ministers not only over the laity but in opposition to them, ... There was no room for any manoeuvre in Bunting's theology of ministry.

The composition of the annual Wesleyan conference was in stark contrast to the equivalent PM body. OLD explains:

For many years the Conference remained entirely ministerial, but laymen sat on connexional committees ... In that year [1836] Bunting declared that the issue of lay-delegation was ‘dead and buried’ so far as the WM Conference itself was concerned. It was not until 1878 that lay members were admitted.

Several writers name William Bramwell (1759-1818), whose ministry was exercised mainly in the north of England, as the principal figure associated with residual revivalism among Wesleyans. His ministry was characterised by emphasis on entire sanctification, compassion for the eternal punishment of unbelievers, crowded and excitable meetings, supernatural experience, corporate and individual prayer, belief in the Devil, and encouragement of female preaching. He is considered a bridge to the ministry of the PMs. Meanwhile, the Wesleyan body had become “intent on appeasing a suspicious government” (Snell & Ell 2000:136).

The first circuit based in the area of this study was Andover, 1818. During that period membership nationwide²⁸ grew in every year except the following, with the losses shown:

28 drawn from Currie, Gilbert Horsley (1977:40)

1820	-2.39%
1835	-0.33%
1837	-0.15%
1842	-0.63%
1847	-0.61%
1848	-0.15%
1851	-15.65%
1852	-6.93%

1851 saw the great nationwide schism, set in motion by dissatisfaction with the concentration of power in the hands of the ministers and the power of Jabez Bunting. Over 100,000 members were lost.

The Circuits

Salisbury, Newbury

The South Wiltshire Circuit (later renamed “Salisbury”) was formed in 1768. In 1769, Vickers (1987) records, it contained only 200 members, about 0.7% of connexional membership, and included all of Hampshire.

Newbury Circuit was formed from Oxfordshire in 1795. It was predominantly rural, and had the following societies or meetings in Hampshire.

Kingsclere

Wesleyans began worshipping in Kingsclere in 1797 in a house in Swan Street. A chapel was built some time in the period 1807 to 1812, when²⁹ Kingsclere had a population of about 1500. A house on Wolverton Common, in the parish, was licensed for worship in June 1828.

²⁹ Smith (2004)

Baughurst

The 1851 religious census records that Wesleyans had been using since 1795 premises joined on to a house but used exclusively for worship. In 1810³⁰ Baughurst had a population of about 400.

Facombe

A house was registered in September 1819. There was³¹ a certificate for a newly erected Methodist chapel in June 1821. Facombe was later transferred to the Andover Circuit.

Burghclere, East Woodhay, Ashmansworth, Sydmonton, Combe

In 1794, 1795, 1824, 1826 and 1826 respectively houses were registered in these villages. In 1810³² Combe had a population of 135; Burghclere about 600³³. None of these villages appears in an 1854 Plan.

Portsmouth, Southampton

Portsmouth Circuit was formed in 1790 from Salisbury and stretched from the Isle of Wight to Newbury and Chichester. The Southampton Circuit was formed in 1798 from Portsmouth with 180 members and two preachers.

In 1793 and 1796 Stamp's financial returns listed only Whitchurch in the area of this thesis, but his lists may not include all societies. In 1794 Hurstbourne Priors and Whitchurch formed one society. 1795 saw some expansion in the area. Hurstbourne Priors and Whitchurch are separate societies, "Laverstock" [Laverstoke, a village of about 100 souls in 1810³⁴] has been added. The chapels at Whitchurch and Baughurst remained the only ones in the region of this study.

In 1801³⁵ Whitchurch had 34 members. Early in the century, the preaching house was replaced by premises in Winchester Street containing other buildings including a cottage. The site was cleared (apart from the cottage), and a chapel opened in 1812, its registration signed by Jason Withers, a clockmaker, and five others who were mainly boot- and shoe-makers.

30 Smith (2004)

31 21M65/F2/4/17, Hampshire Record Office

32 Smith (2004)

33 Smith (2004)

34 Smith 2004

35 Stamp

Stamp says that funds were low and labourers few. In 1804 Stamp includes a note that there were “a few appendages to Whitchurch”; they are not named, but presumably include Laverstoke and Hurstbourne Priors. In July 1796 a house was licensed for worship in Longparish, which had a population of about 550 in 1810³⁶.

According to Smith (2004), Methodists were meeting in a cottage in Overton in 1810. In 1816, a labourer’s house was registered.

In 1796 Winscom signed a certificate³⁷ licensing a house for worship in Dunley. In 1810 a licence³⁸ registered a labourer’s house in the parish of St Mary Bourne for Methodist worship. Robert and Ann Martin signed with marks.

Andover Circuit 1818

Andover became the head of a circuit in 1818 with one minister and 190 members. The Wesleyan Magazine (1825:51) reported that “an increased disposition to hear the truth, has for some time been manifest in the country parts of the Andover Circuit,” and Andover acquired a second minister in 1825. However, from the mid-1830s the work declined, and Paintin (1951:8) says that “Wesleyan Methodism in Andover almost foundered at times in the next sixty years.” The memberships at Andover and Whitchurch moved somewhat erratically as follows:

	1819	1822	1829	1834	1836	1840	1841	1846	1851
ANDOVER	42	18	28	21	15	29	21	14	20
WHITCHURCH	36	32	66	58	100	121	118	78	82

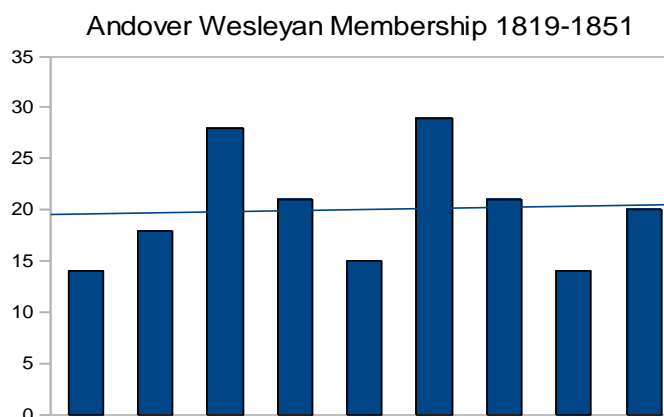
It would not appear that the schism of 1851 had any effect here. Membership increased in 1851 when nationally it decreased by -15.65%. This research has not discovered a pattern or cause of the erratic shifts.

36 Smith (2004)

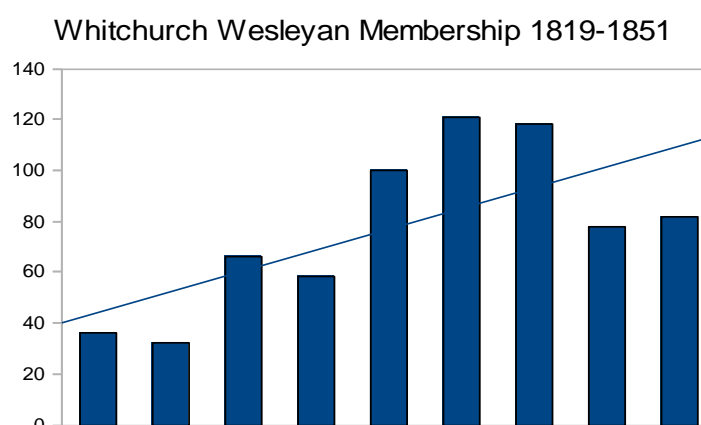
37 21M65/ F2/3/101

38 21M65/F2/3/253 Hampshire Record Office

1819	14
1822	18
1829	28
1834	21
1836	15
1840	29
1841	21
1846	14
1851	20



1819	36
1822	32
1829	66
1834	58
1836	100
1840	121
1841	118
1846	78
1851	82



From 1825 Whitchurch had its own ministers. In February 1827 two labourers' houses were licensed for worship, presumably class meetings. A chapel was built in Overton in the period 1841-2. Circuit records show a membership of 11 at Laverstoke. It had a society from 1822; one of the leaders was a foreman at the paper mill. The religious Census records an 1822 Wesleyan chapel in Hurstbourne Priors. Hurstbourne Tarrant (which had a population of about 1150 in 1810 (Smith (2004)) appears in the Circuit minutes in 1836. The religious census records a morning congregation of 40 in a private house. By the time of the 1851 Census there was no chapel at Longparish, but a room large enough to hold 40 persons was in use. In 1829 a tenement in the parish of St Mary Bourne was set apart for worship, and the village acquired a Wesleyan chapel in 1833.

Basingstoke

Basingstoke appears in the Andover Circuit in October 1825, but disappears in October 1827. The brief, anonymous *History of the Church and of the Methodist Society in Basingstoke from 1739* says on page 6 that “it does not seem there was much immediate advance”. The Wesleyan Magazine (1872:955-6) carries a report from the Rev. G. E. Startup who says: “So far as I can learn, it is more than half a century since Methodism was first introduced into Basingstoke,” implying that any society raised in the age of Wesley died out by the 1820s, and a new start (Startup’s “first introduced”) was made. Startup reports that the meetings were held in the house of Moses Cook, whom the 1841 Census identifies as a baker. He continues:

After a while a more public place was engaged for our work; but from this time the cause began to decline, owing to the difficulty of supplying the pulpit regularly. The assembled congregation would frequently be without a preacher, and then - as a not unnatural result - the preachers would sometimes go, and find almost no congregation. ... The cause soon died out, and for forty or fifty years Basingstoke remained without Wesleyan services.

It is a matter of surmise to what extent such inconsistency in the provision of preaching may have adversely affected attendance in other places, such as Sherfield on Loddon, Sherborne St John, Monk Sherborne, and Dummer where houses were licensed for worship, but the 1851 Census records no Wesleyan meeting in Basingstoke itself.

These facts demonstrate that Wesleyans established themselves in towns (but not Basingstoke), and held meetings in villages, becoming better established in the Andover area than in the vicinity of Basingstoke. Of all the villages listed above, the 1851 religious census records Wesleyan meetings only in Overton, Faccombe, Hurstbourne Priors, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Longparish, St Mary Bourne and Baughurst. Basingstoke became head of a new circuit in 1872; its 1878 plan lists only Basingstoke, Sherborne, Newfound and Cliddesden: that is, they became established only in one of their earlier villages.

It is also clear that both skilled manual and labouring men were drawn to the Wesleyans: members came from a range of social classes. Watts (1995:317-8) shows that in Hampshire Wesleyans attracted a disproportionate number of ‘labour aristocracy’, artisans and higher skilled workers. By the end of this study, Wesleyan strength still lay to the north of a line from the Severn to the Wash.

PM Relations with Wesleyans

In the PM Andover Circuit, the PMs preached both in places where the Wesleyans were at work, and in others where there was no Methodist presence. Vickers (1987:242) comments that, of the 32 preaching places in the Andover PM Branch in 1834, “The majority were small and remote hamlets untouched by the Wesleyans.” As regards villages near Basingstoke, the Wesleyans had worked at Dummer, Sherfield, Sherborne St John and Monk Sherborne, all of which were also missioned by the PMs.

An invitation to Mr Beard to speak at Andover in 1852 is one of the few examples this research has found of a Wesleyan minister being invited into a PM pulpit. The 1851 Magazine reports the Newbury chapel anniversary, at which two Wesleyan ministers preached. One cannot argue from silence, for many chapel openings, anniversaries and other meetings have not been recorded. Nonetheless, such silence hints at the possibility of less cordial relations with Wesleyans than with the Old Dissent. Sheard (1980:558) comments that “The Primitive Methodists continued to enjoy good relations with Independents and Baptists, but in the 1840s and 1850s there were increasing numbers of ‘official’ contacts amongst the various Methodist bodies.” Watts (1995:156) comments that by 1850 it was becoming usual for Wesleyan ministers to preach in PM chapels on special occasions, and vice versa. In contrast, Morris (1967) notes that “a very fine spirit existed from the beginning between the two denominations” in Nottinghamshire, adding that the Wesleyans were predominantly non-working-class with a fair representation from the professions.

Russell (1869:31, 33) relates examples of friendly relations with a Wesleyan minister:

The constable offered me leave to call on anyone that I thought well, so having learned that the Rev. James Loutit, Wesleyan, was in that town, I called at his lodgings, and he kindly sympathised with me, and took a copy of my mittimus, and after praying with him I bade him farewell.

On my entrance into the prison ... Mr. Loutit got access [to visit].

(A mittimus orders a police officer or gaoler to guard a felon or escort one to prison, or is a transcript of conviction and sentencing.)

Hatcher (1993:156) comments that, in the Hull area, part of the early PM leadership was made up of disaffected Wesleyans, and Milburn (2002:25) points out that “Primitives did not set out to poach

Wesleyan members but without doubt they did attract a good many of them, including some experienced and knowledgeable leaders.” Some adherents and preachers in Hampshire were recruited from a Wesleyan background, but if they were not numerous, it may be due partly to the meagre presence of Wesleyans, and the literature gives no reason to suspect it was disaffection which urged them to transfer. Some were converted whilst among the Wesleyans and transferred later, others were converted only after hearing the PMs and decided to join the body which had brought them to faith. George Eudall was born in Lincolnshire in 1810 and converted among the Wesleyans in about 1830. He joined the PMs, and was stationed in Shefford in 1845, Basingstoke in 1848, and Andover 1851-2. Other examples are mentioned in this dissertation, but no consistent pattern is discernible. Taylor (1935:138) states that “The other Methodist Connexions, such as the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians have set up, had been new developments rather than ‘schisms’. Far from weakening Methodism, they had added to its strength in new areas and new social classes.” This accords with the findings for this dissertation. The PM principle of not seeking to entice people who had found evangelical faith in another denomination implies that the majority of worshippers were converts who previously attended nowhere, or who had done so for reasons other than personal belief.

Wesleyan and Primitive Success

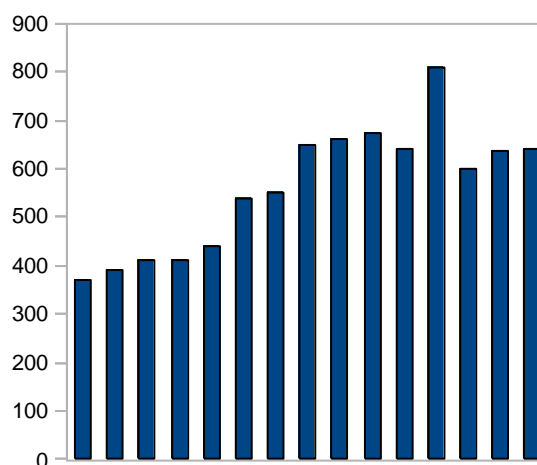
Edward Bishop reported that³⁹: “In the great majority of these villages we found neither Independents nor Baptists, nor Wesleyan Methodists, when we entered the county in 1832.” By the time of the Religious Census, PMs were much more numerous than Wesleyans. From the Basingstoke, Whitchurch, Andover and Kingsclere registration districts of the Census, which include some societies outside the area of this study, these figures for attendance present themselves:

	morning	afternoon	evening
<i>Prim. Meth.</i>	838	1958	2366
<i>Wesleyan</i>	504	685	1309

39 Petty (1880:331)

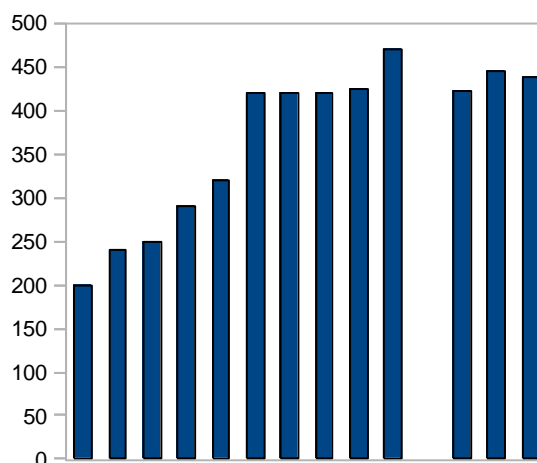
The graphs and figures below show membership of the two main Hampshire PM circuits. Here is the Andover circuit membership 1838-52 (Minutes of Conference; 1846 from annual report to Brinkworth District):

1838	370
1839	390
1840	410
1841	410
1842	440
1843	540
1844	550
1845	650
1846	660
1847	675
1848	641
1849	811
1850	602
1851	635
1852	640

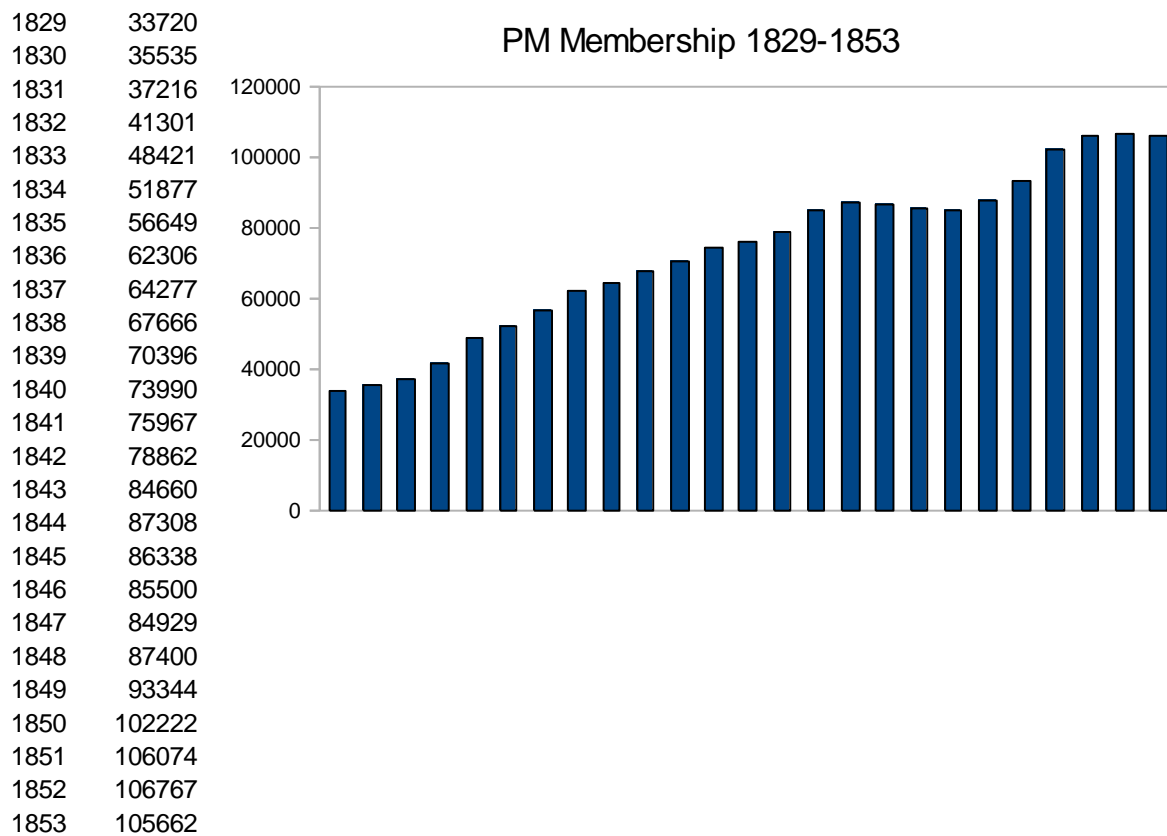


Here is the Mitcheldever Circuit membership 1836-1849 from Minutes of Conference; in 1850-2 there are separate entries for Basingstoke, Bishop's Waltham, and Southampton. 1846 is missing.

1836	200
1837	240
1838	250
1839	290
1840	320
1841	420
1842	420
1843	420
1844	425
1845	469
1846	
1847	422
1848	445
1849	437



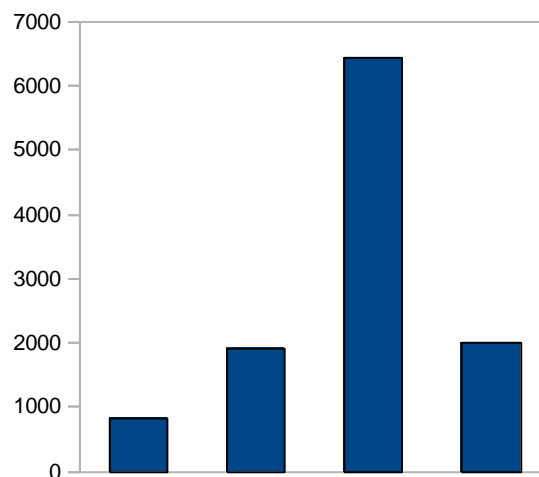
The figures show a broad similarity between national trends (below) and the local trends noted above.



Anonymous pamphlets called Fly Sheets, critical of Wesleyan conference policy, and in particular of Jabez Bunting, appeared 1844-9, three suspected ministers were expelled, the expulsions were widely condemned, even in *The Times*, and over 100,000 members were lost. But in northern Hampshire, by 1851, both Wesleyan and PM connexions were growing. When the Hampshire PMs approached their high point (1845-9), the Andover and Whitchurch Wesleyans were near their lowest, but recovered over the next quinquennium. Calder’s comment, that the national PM growth “was clearly in part fallout from the Wesleyan Fly Sheets controversy,” cannot apply here, as the Wesleyan schism did not seem to affect the Hampshire circuits.

The chart below lists the places in this thesis in which Methodist and Independent meetings were held in the period 1738-1852. It shows the best congregation of each place of worship on Census Sunday 1851. The columns on the graph are in the same order as in the table. There were Methodist meetings at various times also in Binley, Dunley, Plastow Green, Little London, Newfound, and Stoke, but there are no Census returns for these settlements.

	WM	PM	CofE	Indep
Andover	103	120	712	300
Whitchurch	150	190	300	150
Overton	57		350	150
H. Priors	80	110	103	
H. Tarrant	40		300	110
Laverstoke			60	
Longparish	30		180	
Dummer			110	
St M. Bourne	41	185	130	
Sherfield		50	45	110
Sherborne St J		126	250	
Monk Sherborne			40	
Kingsclere	176	75	235	
Facombe	70		25	
East Woodhay			169	55
Ashmansworth			42	
Burghclere			240	
Sydmonton			50	
Baughurst	35	160	42	
Combe			50	
Basingstoke		100	467	330
Ecchinswell			50	66
Upton			152	73
Ashfordhill	40	86		
Rotherwick			123	
Silchester		174	81	
Mortimer				150
Tadley		91	250	300
Hannington			120	
Gore End		80		
Charter Alley		137		
Oakley			102	
Herriard			143	
Steventon			52	
Ellisfield			60	
Stratfield Saye			151	
Basing			150	50
Tufton			60	
Bramley			71	
Ramsdell				85
Upton Grey			100	26
Newnham		80	165	
Cliddesden			60	
Mapledurwell			75	
Greywell			125	33
N. Waltham		135	125	
Worting			142	26
Wootton St L.			138	
Wolverton			57	
TOTALS	822	1899	6452	2014



Disregarding the main towns, a number of comments emerge:

- Although it had mounted meetings in other villages, Wesleyan Methodism was established only in and near the Bourne Valley and in the part of Hampshire served by the Newbury Circuit.
- PMism had not established itself in every place that had been on their Plans.
- Of the eight villages which had Wesleyan services, five also had a PM service, whilst three did not. Eight villages are listed as having PM services but no Wesleyan. Such distribution of the denominations would not support a theory that PMism fed parasitically on Wesleyan evangelism or presence. Nonetheless, the Census lists strong PM services in Sherfield and Sherborne St John where Wesleyan worship had earlier been registered. The Wesleyans also registered places for worship, but faded out, in Burghclere (1794) and Dummer (1828), which had PM chapels functioning well into living memory. Taken together, this points to a suggestion that the ground was prepared for Methodism in some places by earlier Wesleyans, making them receptive to PMism after the Wesleyans had begun to undergo the early nineteenth century changes noted above. Vickers comments⁴⁰:

Wesleyan preachers had withdrawn from many of the village causes and were concentrating on the town chapels, so that the Prims had a ready-made opportunity which they seized upon.

This was certainly true in rural parts of the south which I covered in my thesis.

Tiller (2006) argues that PMism did not follow Wesleyan Methodism and take root either where the Wesleyans had been, or where they still were, but rather many PM causes were established where there was no Wesleyan society, which seems to have been duplicated in Hampshire. Tiller also observed that the PMs and the Wesleyans tended to take root in different sorts of place, Wesleyans being weakest where Old Dissent was strong, whereas PMism took root where Dissent was also strong.

Milburn (2002:25) writes that, “It can be argued that Primitive Methodism had the advantage of building on earlier Wesleyan foundations in the sense that the style, language, hymnody and organization of Methodism were already familiar, and part of the fabric of social life in many

40 email, 22.5.2013

communities by the 1820s when Primitive Methodism appeared as a new and energetic expression of a familiar feature of religious life, ... The Primitives did not set out to poach Wesleyan members but without doubt they did attract a good many of them”.

In both connexions, a number of places on the preaching Plans proved to be short-lived, with no society lastingly established. Nonetheless, the question arises why the PMs established themselves more widely than the Wesleyans. A number of explanations suggest themselves:

- By the time the first Wesleyan Circuit based in the area was formed, the movement was already in its third or fourth generation, whereas PMism entered northern Hampshire a mere 23 years after the first camp meeting at Mow Cop, and its founders were still active leaders. Most religious movements enter a calmer phase by their third or fourth generation, with energy devoted to building and sustaining an infrastructure.
- Wesleyan Methodism under Jabez Bunting operated under authoritarian central control, whereas PMism enjoyed the spontaneity of local circuit autonomy.
- The more democratic character of PMism allowed the laity more importance and activity in organisation and service, and attracted working-class men and women whose secular status denied these to them.
- Wesleyan ministers had largely changed from itinerant evangelists into pastors nurturing established societies, maintaining what had been achieved, more than expanding.
- Wesleyans had pursued a policy of targeting denser, urban populations, whereas the PMs focused on rural communities; this also meant that the Wesleyans attracted a higher proportion of artisan, middle-class adherents than the PMs, in a time when northern Hampshire was largely rural with poor agricultural labourers.

Excluding, from the figure below, Basingstoke, Andover, Whitchurch, Overton and Kingsclere as likely to provide sufficient population for several non-Anglican denominations, the research has discovered Wesleyan meetings at various times from 1738 in the villages in the left-hand column, but in the 1851 census surviving only in the ones in the left middle column; PM meetings are listed in 1851 in the right middle column. In the years 1863-1871 PM chapels were built in the villages listed in the right-hand column.

The columns show:

- In 11 villages, the Wesleyans and PMs both had meetings.
- The PMs had meetings in 15 additional villages.
- There were 5 villages with Wesleyan but no PM meetings.

<u>Wesleyan 1738ff</u>	<u>Wesleyan 1851</u>	<u>PM 1851</u>	<u>PM chapels 1863-71</u>
Ashfordhill	Ashfordhill	Ashfordhill	
Ashmansworth			
Baughurst	Baughurst	Baughurst	
Burghclere			Burghclere
Combe			
Dummer			Dummer
East Woodhay		East Woodhay ⁴¹	
Facombe	Facombe		
Hurstbourne Priors		Hurstbourne Priors	
Hurstbourne Tarrant			Hurstbourne Tarrant ⁴²
Laverstoke			
Longparish	Longparish		Longparish ⁴³
Monk Sherborne			
Saint Mary Bourne	St Mary Bourne	St Mary Bourne	
Sherborne St John		Sherborne	
Sherfield on Loddon		Sherfield	
Sydmonton			
		Charter Alley	
		Newnham	
		North Waltham	
		Silchester	
		Tadley	
		<i>Facombe</i> ⁴⁴	
			Hannington 1871 ⁴⁵
			Little London 1868
			Oakley 1866
			Wootton St Lawrence 1870
			Plastow Green 1866
			Wolverton Common 1864
			Basing 1867
			Stoke 1864 ⁴⁶

41 Gore End, in East Woodhay parish

42 Ibthorpe, in Hurstbourne Tarrant parish

43 in the area called Forton

44 Facombe is included, although there is no PM census return. The PMs had an 1847 chapel there, plus members listed in 1850 and 1852, and the assumption here is that the census is incomplete.

45 dates in this block are from *The Methodist Church Statistical Returns 1970*

46 Hants CRO 36M94/9

C: OLD DISSENT

The Old Dissent was sparsely represented in the area, with the exception of Whitchurch, as the following table demonstrates. Other than in the towns, it was not a significant feature of the background to the PM mission. As noted above, Edward Bishop reported that “In the great majority of these villages we found neither Independents nor Baptists.” The Old Dissent means Independents and Baptists; others were numerically too insignificant to come into this discussion: the 1851 religious census lists 25 Quakers meeting only in Basingstoke; the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion and Presbyterians only in Basingstoke. Baptists had congregations listed in Longparish, St Mary Bourne and Whitchurch; in addition, local historian Richard Tanner sent a note based on document 21M65/F2/3/178 at Winchester concerning Baptists at North Waltham in 1803, but this group seems to have faded out.

Baptists and Independents had a different origin and purpose from PMism, aiming to reform a church which they perceived as distorted or corrupted. They contended for the autonomy of the local church. Evangelism was not their primary original purpose, though the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century quickened this activity among them. Good relations often existed between them and PMs. Disregarding the four largest settlements (Andover, Whitchurch, Overton, Basingstoke), of the twelve villages which had Independent congregations, only Sherfield and Tadley also sent in returns for a PM service in 1851. Watts (1995:317-8) shows that in Hampshire the Independents attracted a disproportionate number of ‘labour aristocracy’, artisans and higher skilled workers.

Information in the following chart has been collated in two publications, for 1810 Smith (2004), and for 1765 and 1788 Ward (1995). The following towns and villages concern this study:

THE OLD DISSENT

	1765	1788	1810
ANDOVER	1 meeting house		Independent and Quaker
BURGHCLERE	Presbyterians (worshipping in Newbury)		
LONGPARISH	Baptists	22 Baptists	Baptist
OLD BASING	Baptists, no meeting house		
ST MARY BOURNE	Baptists, no meeting house	3 Baptists	
SHERFIELD on LODDON	1 Quaker		
WHITCHURCH	very many, 4 meeting houses	120 Independents 80 Baptists 11 Quakers a few Moravians numerous Wesleyans	
BASINGSTOKE ⁴⁷		163 Presbyterians 16 Quakers	3
BAUGHURST		Quaker meeting house (mainly 1 family)	Quaker
MICHELDEVER		1 Quaker	
TADLEY			Independent
STRATFIELD SAYE			Baptist

⁴⁷ Basingstoke had 190 “Methodists” in 1788, who presumably belonged to the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion; in 1810 it had three denominations of Dissenters, the third presumably being the Countess’s Connexion.

Concerning relations with the Old Dissent, Russell (2005) supplies instances of friendly contact with Dissenters.

Sunday, April 4 [1830] Numbers crowded round me as soon as I entered the place [Ramsbury], children and young men ringing hand bells, sheep bells, horse bells, and blowing horns, shouting &c., to a strange pitch. ... I walked towards the lower part of the town, and on the road a Baptist minister's widow, with true sympathy and kindness, and with heroic courage, rushing into the midst of these ruffians, cried shame upon them for their conduct, and took me into her house.

[1830] On my entrance into the prison ... Mr. Loutit [Wesleyan] got access ... and so did the Rev. Mr. Wilkins, Congregationalist.

[page 41] Mr. Ashley, the minister of the Union Chapel, in Newbury, sent me an invitation to preach in his place of worship. I accepted it.

Union Chapel was an 1824 secession from the Wesleyans. Russell (1886) relates that that invitation opened the way to “Burghclere, and other places.” Russell (1880) adds Mr Kershaw, Baptist minister, to the list of those who “interested themselves zealously” in the matter of his imprisonment at Abingdon, and adds that they brought the case to the Religious Protection Society. Also, an Independent lay preacher visited him in prison and assisted the situation.

Under the entry dated 1st May 1831, Russell writes: “Also another youth in Upton, now the Rev. Mr. Johnson, obtained religion (I think when at school), and became an Independent minister, ... He now resides at Upton, where he has built a chapel ... and they have an excellent helper constantly labouring as a village preacher.” (That 1839 chapel later became PM.) This shows Russell’s warm appreciation of Independents, whom he calls “that worthy body of Christians.”

In 1832⁴⁸ at Wantage, Russell, wishing to “escape the fury of the mob,” decided to preach at 5 a.m., and was told by the Baptist minister that he was welcome to preach at the door of the Baptist chapel, as that minister thought it would be a safer position for him. “I went accordingly, and had for once a peaceable hearing,” he records.

William Thorn, Independent minister of Winchester, offered Ride and Russell the use of his library during their imprisonment in 1834, supported the PMs’ attempt to acquire a chapel in Micheldever

48 page 68

by writing to Thomas Baring in the 1840s, and was booked to preach⁴⁹ at the opening of the Corn Exchange in Winchester as a place of PM worship in October 1852. In the event he was ill, and was replaced by another Independent minister, Mr Houghton of Botley.

In 1839 John Ride, superintending the Reading Circuit, wrote, "I am grateful to God ... for the interest taken by the ministers and friends of other churches in our welfare." The Baptist and Independent ministers were present at the opening of Salem PM Chapel in Reading in 1839. Also in 1839, when Newbury chapel was re-opened after a gallery had been put in, one of the preachers was S. Curwen (also spelled Curwin), Independent minister.⁵⁰

The 1841 Magazine reports the chapel anniversary in Newbury, at which J. H. Pike pastor of Newbury Baptist church preached the afternoon sermon. The Magazine (1843:164-5) reports the burial of local preacher Hannah Ford of Silchester by the Independent minister at the Independent chapel-yard in Mortimer.

In 1844, the Magazine (page 460) reported the Andover chapel anniversary. J. P. Pearsall, Independent minister preached. On the Monday afternoon, 120 attended a meeting at which Mr Applegate, a Baptist minister, "addressed us in a speech abounding in sentiments of brotherly love and Christian union." Pearsall was one of the two preachers at the Andover chapel anniversary the following year.

In 1846 the chapel at Newnham was opened. That year's Magazine (page 752) reports a Mr Neller, Independent minister from Odiham, as one of the preachers.

PM preacher William Merritt was apprehended and confined for preaching in the open air at Basingstoke and a few hours later, some friends connected with the Independent Church secured his release.⁵¹ In 1847, at the opening of Basingstoke chapel, A. Johnson, Independent minister, was one of the preachers, and (Magazine:693) at Andover anniversary a public meeting was addressed by Rev. W. Goodman, Baptist.

The Magazine in 1850 reports that on 7th October, at the chapel anniversary in Reading, "the fraternal feeling manifested on the occasion by the dissenting ministers of the town was very pleasing."

49 Magazine (1852:693)

50 Magazine (1839:419-20)

51 Magazine 1847

The 1851 Magazine reports the Reading chapel anniversary, when W. Mather, Independent, presided at the public meeting.

The 1852:691-2 Magazine reported that the Andover chapel anniversary was celebrated on Sunday and Monday 5th and 6th September. On the Monday 130 people were addressed at a meeting by Mr Heathcote (Independent), Mr Crofts (Baptist), and Mr Beard (Wesleyan). J. Drew, Baptist minister of Newbury, preached at the Newbury chapel anniversary in September.

Morris (1967:348) notes that relations between the Baptists and PMs “were always very good”. Tiller (2006:98, 102), as noted in the Literature Review, records that in nearby Oxfordshire Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans all sprang to the support of the PMs in their sufferings at the hands of opposers, thus showing that the PMs were perceived from the outset as members of a wider community of Dissenters. A chapel was opened in Northmoor in 1843, and all the preachers were Baptists. Clearly the PMs were counted as fellows, not unwelcome competitors. Sheard (1980:557) writes: “It is not perhaps surprising that some of the most positive encouragement came to the early Ranters not from other Methodist bodies, to whom they sometimes looked like competitors, but from Old Dissent.” Further evidence of good relations is the preaching of Independent ministers at chapel openings in 1832 and 1833 in the Chester and Oswestry Circuits.

Comparative Success

William Hale White (1831-1913) was born in Bedford, where his family were members of a strong Independent congregation. There is no reason to doubt his portrayal of a typical Sunday among the Calvinistic Old Dissent (1881:12-14). Contrast with the exuberant PM services must be a cause for the success of the latter:

It was a season of unmingled gloom...

There were three services every Sunday. ... Each service consisted of a hymn, reading the Bible, another hymn, a prayer, the sermon, a third hymn, and a short final prayer. ... The first, or long prayer, as it was called, was a horrible hypocrisy, and it was a sore tax on the preacher to get through it. Anything more totally unlike the model recommended in the New Testament cannot well be imagined. ... very much resembling the speeches which in later years

I have heard in the House of Commons from the movers and seconders of addresses to the Crown at the opening of Parliament.

In all the religion of that day nothing was falser than the long prayer. ... To come maundering into His presence when we have nothing particular to say is an insult, ... Nobody ever listened to this performance.

The sermon was not much better. ... The minister invariably began with the fall of man; propounded the scheme of redemption, and ended by depicting in the morning the blessedness of the saints, and in the evening the doom of the lost.

The evening service was the most trying of all.

The PMs did not enjoy greater success because they evangelised in an environment congenial to Evangelical religion, for that was available also to the Old Dissent, but their flexible, adaptable system, and their homely meetings in class and society were not shared by the Old Dissent.

D: ANGLICAN

Neglect

Edward Bishop, writing of the PM mission in Hampshire in the 1830s, reported that⁵²:

many hamlets, and some of these of considerable size, were then destitute both of church and school.

The gentry, clergy, and gentlemen farmers formed one class of society; and shepherds, woodmen, ploughmen, &c., another. ... between them was a great chasm.

The similarity with Tiller's Oxfordshire is striking. The first PM missionary to Oxfordshire came to Witney in 1824: in nearby villages "he found great numbers of the inhabitants living in darkness, sin and misery. Many of them had not heard a sermon for twenty, and some thirty, years."

Three comments about the Church of England which Clifford, later President of the Baptist Union and the National Council of Evangelical Churches, wrote in his October 1876 paper to the Baptist Union, are worth citing:

- *the Church has failed to secure and nourish a manly, healthy and strong spiritual life in the rural parishes*
- *its failure is grievously conspicuous to the eye of every unbiassed observer*
- *the labouring population becomes more and more averse, first to the priest and his ways, and, next, to the religion he is supposed to represent.*

Truss comments that one "reason why Primitive Methodism was so successful in the Wolds was the weakness of the Church of England. Long years of neglect ... had left many Wolds parishes without a resident clergyman or a church that was even wind- and-waterproof."

Johnson (1989) writes that "The North Midlands was a case book area of Anglican pastoral weakness. ... Primitive Methodism's primary appeal was to miners, factory workers, as well as agricultural labourers; in other words, those members of the labouring people previously neglected by existing denominations."

Rowe's article about the Hampshire agricultural labourer, quoted earlier, continues:

52 Petty (1880:331-2)

As might be expected his spiritual condition was of the worst. His morality was of the lowest. He very rarely went to the Established Church, for he felt he was not wanted there. He believed the "parson" did not care for him, and was only desirous of keeping him "in his place." He knew he had nothing in common with him. He was of too worldly a character to benefit him religiously, and though I gratefully acknowledge there were good and useful "parsons," the labourer's idea of them as a class, was not far wrong.

Miall (n.d.) writes that village populations exhibit "scarcely a sign of successful religious culture as the direct result of State-Church teaching", especially in small country parishes, retired villages and scattered hamlets:

If the Church of England clergy, as a body, had done their duty as spiritual guides, is it reasonable, is it possible, to believe that the agricultural labourers could have sunk into a condition so helpless, hopeless, debased, and wretched?

The 1851 religious census shows that attendance at Anglican churches was highest in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset, and higher in rural than urban areas. This would seem to contradict Rowe's *He very rarely went to the Established Church*; perhaps in other parts of England the rural poor simply attended even less, but a nationwide statistical comparison lies outside the scope of this thesis.

Alienation

Knight (2012:77) explains the self-image of the typical rural Anglican clergyman of the period: "The sermons reveal the village clergy as ... an autocratic body - rectors in the ancient sense of rulers - maintaining a somewhat unrealistic vision of rural unity, in which they were themselves at the centre." They occupied a central and dominant rôle in village life. The vicar was often either the most powerful person in the community, or second after the squire. They were allies. Werner (1984:179) records that half the magistrates were Anglican clergy, with country houses, genteel manners, and fashionable pastimes. They appointed parish constables, administered the Poor Law, and, as members of the gentry, were associated with the hated enclosures.

Two writings (1849 and undated) of Edward Miall supply penetrating insights, which (in view of the absence of other Dissent from so many villages in Hampshire) should be applied here mainly to the Established Church. In the former he writes:

in Great Britain, we carry our class distinctions into the house of God, ... The poor man is made to feel that he is a poor man, the rich is reminded that he is rich, in the great majority of churches and chapels. ... The banker or the merchant pays no more attention to the small tradesman, or the tradesman to the labourer, in the sanctuary than out of it. All is artificial and conventional.

Thompson (1939:202-3) describes the Anglican religion preached in her native hamlet as “not religion but a narrow code of ethics, imposed from above upon the lower orders, ... They did not listen.”

All this combined to stigmatise the Established Church and to alienate the poor.

Opposition

It was often from Anglican clergy that opposition to PMism, and indeed to Dissent more widely, came. Clifford (1876:7, 15) writes:

But it is intolerable that landowner and squire, justice of the peace and priest of the Church, should form a confederacy to close the chapel doors, and stamp out the hated pestilence of Dissent. ...

The Free Churches in the rural districts are passing through a severe trial. The clergy have adopted the principle of extermination. Their policy is the policy of suppression, and wherever they can they will carry it out without stint ... there is no such thing as religious liberty in two thousand villages of England.

Tiller (2006:100, 108) relates that PM preacher Isaac Hedges was sentenced to 21 days' hard labour for preaching to five people in front of the blacksmith's shop in Ambrosden in 1840, the magistrates being a surgeon and a clergyman, and that at Swyncombe PM parents were told that education in the Church school must be denied them.

Miall (n.d.) points out that in regard to “the rights of labour” the clergy usually sided with landowners, and often “played the oppressor” in rural areas. This accords with Everitt (1972) who says that, “In many cases there was a definite campaign on the part of the parson to stamp out Nonconformity in his parish.” Concerning Methodists specifically, Miall adds that “all the machinery of social oppression is brought to bear upon any of the poor parishioners who dare to have and express ... a faith, on their own responsibility.” All of this combined to persuade “the whole class of labourers” that the social and religious leaders of society were united in keeping them “in a downcast position” alienating the peasantry from the Anglican Church. But no instance has emerged in this research of a clergyman refusing to marry PMs.

PM Success

It was easier for PMs to gain a foothold in settlements where some people were not subject to clerical or aristocratic domination, or in need of parish relief. Further, the alienation of the rural population of labourers from the Church of England indubitably contributed to their success, once a sense of religious need was awakened within them. Towards the end of his depiction of early PMism, Minor (1982:80) comments:

...all this gave to the poor a voice and a place where they were significant and accepted at a time when they were silenced in the established Church.

As well as providing a place for voices to be heard and people accepted, Primitive Methodism gave a measure of discipline and self-respect at a time when the rural poor needed it.

Thompson (1968:437) says that “The chapel in the agricultural village was inevitably an affront to the vicar and the squire, and a centre in which the labourer gained independence and self-respect.” Morris (1967:185-6) writes that PMism “gave the ordinary man confidence and self-esteem. The chapel was a social refuge. ... In Primitive Methodism the working class found ... an opportunity for service and leadership ... new purpose and zest in life.” Turner (1985:86) states that the sense of need among the labouring poor was met partly by a feeling of worth which PMism provided: “The chapel gave people a sense of belonging at a time of social tension, a high proportion of members holding some office.” Johnson (1989) makes a similar point: “The Primitive Methodists were aware that even under the most harsh conditions they could raise the heads of their members above the social and cultural anarchy, and display a pride, self-respect and dignity which was rooted within

and reflected the strength of their ‘household of faith.’ The next chapter, with its focus on PM communal life, supplies strong support for these assertions.

CHAPTER 4:

PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter highlights the beliefs and practices which distinguished PMs from other denominations, and turns then to their principles and methods of evangelism, worship and fellowship. Its second part considers shifts in emphasis and outlook which became noticeable from about the mid 1840s, describing them first from a national perspective, then exemplifying the new trends from within Hampshire. These features were common to the movement throughout the country, and are evident frequently in Hampshire as will become apparent especially in Chapters 5-7. This in turn supports the hypothesis that early PMism has frequently been misrepresented both by some who admire it and by some who deplore it.

A: THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS

Doctrines

No doctrines are peculiar to PMism, deriving as they do from the parent Wesleyan body. The Deed Poll establishing the legal denomination in 1830 gave Wesley's Sermons and Notes on the New Testament as its teachings. They are summarised in the 1836 and 1849 Minutes of Conference:

- The innocency of man in his first state
- The fall of man [1849 add "and that of their posterity"]
- General redemption by Jesus Christ
- Repentance
- Justification by faith of the ungodly on their turning to God
- The witness of the Spirit
- Sanctification by the Holy Spirit, producing inward and outward holiness
- The doctrine of the Trinity
- The proper divinity of Jesus Christ
- The resurrection of the dead
- The general judgment
- Eternal rewards and punishments

The Minutes continue: “No person must be allowed to hold any office in our Connexion, who publishes or promulgates any doctrine contrary to those held by us.” They state that the March quarterly meeting had the duty of preparing a report on its societies, institutions and officers to be sent to the ensuing District Meeting and the ensuing Conference. For this purpose a form was prepared by the connexional Book Committee.

The PMs sought to maintain doctrinal purity in their pulpits. As Garratt (2002:69) points out:

Potential itinerants were first required to face the circuit committee in which they resided to answer questions concerning their doctrine and personal religious condition. Once the committee had made its decision, the matter was passed over to the quarter-day board, who further examined the case and made its recommendation to the district meeting.

Doctrinal loyalty to the Connexion’s standards was taken seriously. Both Andover and Mitcheldever Circuits removed preachers who (they considered) were purveying false doctrines. The Mitcheldever circuit committee minutes for October 1841 resolve “That H Prior be not allowed to preach among us till Quarter Day for preaching doctring contrary to Rule and that the case be [illegible] to Quarter Day.” The Reading Circuit quarterly meeting of December 1843 resolved “That all persons proposed to be put on the plan shall be examined in Doctrinal matters and taken in writing, signed according to rule and brought to the Circuit Town and preserved.”

In 1845 John Buckland was removed from the Reading Circuit Plan “as he does not believe in eternal punishment.” Reading Circuit quarterly meeting, March 1845: “That if any one of our Local Preachers identify himself with the Second Advent Brethren he ceases to be a member with us.” It is not clear who the Second Advent Brethren were, possibly people associated with the teachings of the New England farmer William Miller, whose prediction that the Second Coming would happen in 1843 led to the formation of the Seventh Day Adventists. Whoever they were, they clearly held what was deemed erroneous eschatology. In December 1845 the Reading Circuit resolved: “That all the Prayer leaders be requested to state their doctrinal views.”

Arminian

Theological convictions motivated the PMs’ evangelism, and underlie the whole Hampshire narrative. Methodists were “the only Church, apart from a small section of the Baptists, that was

unanimously and emphatically Arminian” (T. E. Jessop in Davies, George and Rupp (Eds) (1978:180)).

Calvinism has been summarised by the mnemonic TULIP, the so-called “five points of Calvinism” which some say originated with Augustine of Hippo: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints. The middle tenet was foremost in the controversy with early Wesleyans: it holds that the purpose of Christ’s death was to secure the salvation only of the elect, whose salvation God decreed unilaterally and unconditionally before the foundation of the world.

Against this stands the second of the “Four Alls of Methodism”: “All men may be saved.” The Wesleys taught that Christ died to make salvation available to all. This was not to say that all men *will* be saved, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6C, but only such as respond in faith to the call of God’s grace, which can be resisted. Parrott (1866:146-50) is a PM witness to this teaching:

God hath provided salvation for every man; wills that all should enjoy it; calls upon every one to accept it; accompanies the call with power to obey; and that every one may exercise that power and obtain salvation or refuse to exercise it, and exclude himself from saving mercy.

The controversy thus focussed on the “Horrible Decree”, a phrase taken from Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III: *Decretum quidem horribile fateor*⁵³. It includes the concept that God not only unconditionally decreed who was to be saved, but also who should be damned. Calvinism softened somewhat during the late 18th and the 19th centuries, and the bitterness of the controversy abated. Engagement in it does not feature in the narrative of this thesis, but Arminian soteriology was an integral part of the ethos and motivation of PMism.

Christian Perfection

Any Christian desires to progress in holiness, but the quest found expression in Methodism in the birth and development of a particular doctrine and aspiration, entire sanctification. Parrott continues:

It implies not only a being separated and set apart for God, but also a removal of the carnal or fleshly mind, and the actual possession of the mind of Christ, the dislodgment of every principle, temper, and feeling of an unholy nature, and the implantation of the opposites; so

53 The decree, I acknowledge, is certainly such as to make one shudder - My translation

that nothing contrary to the perfect love of God and man now dwells in such a Christian. ... those who are prepared to receive it, having felt their need of it, sought it properly, by strong faith, realize it as suddenly, as the impious man did his cure. ... In this state of inward and outward holiness, they teach that man may live till death.

Obelkevich (1976:233) writes of “a Primitive Methodist’s spiritual career”: “The highest and rarest stage was that of ‘entire sanctification’; ... In practice, however, it was an extremely infrequent accomplishment; ... But it nevertheless was representative of the spirituality of the early years.” In the question in the annual report required from circuits concerning PM ministers, “Does he preach a full, free and present salvation?” the word “full” is a reference to this teaching.

The doctrine of Christian Perfection, or Entire Sanctification, is set out in Wesley’s *A plain Account of Christian Perfection* and in many of Charles Wesley’s hymns, especially in the section of the 1780 hymnbook entitled *For Believers Seeking for full Redemption*. It is necessary for an understanding of the inner world of PMism. Wesley draws his sermon on *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (XLIII in the *53 Sermons on several Occasions*) towards a conclusion in these words:

To this confidence, that God is both able and willing to sanctify us now, there needs to be added one thing more - a divine evidence and conviction that he doeth it. In that hour it is done. God says to the inmost soul, “According to thy faith be it unto thee!” Then the soul is pure from every spot of sin; it is clean “from all unrighteousness”...

“But does God work this great work in the soul gradually or instantaneously?” Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some; ... But is infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin “by the breath of his mouth,” in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And so he generally does; ... Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith.

The 1837 Magazine contains Edward Bishop’s account of a meeting held on 4th June at Sherfield Green, where “I preached upon the subject of sanctification. Six or seven made a satisfactory profession of the reception and enjoyment of the blessing.” PM minister Elizabeth Smith (Russell 2005:185-7), who figures largely in the Hampshire narrative, wrote in 1827 to Sarah Evans of Clunbury Hill: “O that God would bless thee, and make thee and me perfect in himself.” And in a June 1827 letter to the same recipient:

You will ask what is implied in sanctification. It implies the renewal of the mind after the image of God, feeling an entire resignation to the will of God, a sinking into nothing, so that Christ be all and in all. ... I speak from my own experience.

She wrote to Mrs Barnes of Hook: “Go on; confess the work of entire sanctification” (August 1830) and “When God sanctified my soul, and enabled me to love him with all my heart, and hate sin, I could rejoice” (December, 1831). To Mrs Newton of Blunsden at about the same time: “There is a very great work going on in Berkshire; and one thing particularly gladdens my heart, entire sanctification, (or as the apostle calls it, to be sanctified wholly), becomes a general subject of conversation among the preachers.”

Assurance

Parrott (1866) continues: “all who truly believe, receive the Spirit of God, which testifies with the believer’s own spirit that he is an adopted and saved child of God; and the result is unspeakable inward peace and joy.” The Methodist emphasis on assurance may be summed up in the phrase “the witness of the Spirit”. It is the privilege of every believer to know that he or she is a child of God, as the Spirit of God impresses this conviction on the believer’s own spirit. The theme forms a major motif in Charles Wesley’s hymns, Wesley’s standard sermons, and in the PM hymnbook. It is a frequent motif in Hampshire PMism, and a vibrant feature in its ethos.

Meetings: Organisational

Conference

The denomination’s first annual conference was held in 1820. Delegates to the annual conference were elected by district meetings, being one third itinerant preachers and two thirds local preachers, class leaders or circuit stewards, plus not more than four others appointed by the previous conference, a considerably more democratic arrangement than the Wesleyan.

Quarterly

The 1849 Consolidated Minutes explain that the highest official meeting of a circuit was its quarterly meeting, composed of preachers, class leaders, circuit stewards, society stewards, “and

such representatives from the societies as are, by virtue of their office, members of the meeting without being delegated thereto,” and such other persons as it chose to admit. They usually took place in March, June, September and December. The meeting was preceded by the preachers’ meeting made up of the circuit steward and all preachers with appointments on the Plan. The circuit committee carried out the quarterly meeting’s decisions and managed the circuit’s general affairs.

Regulation #10 in the 1837 and 1838 Mitcheldever Plans stipulates that:

No charge can be received, either in a Committee or Quarterly Meeting, except the person charged be present, or has been seen and spoken to, privately and fully, upon the charge, by the person who brings it. For every offence against this Rule, the offender shall forfeit sixpence.

Likewise, Regulation #10 in the Newbury PM Plan for 1850-1 stipulated that: “No charge of immorality shall be received against a preacher, either in committee or quarterly meeting, unless he be present, or has been spoken to by the person who prefers it.”

It is thus apparent that part of the ethos of the denomination was a robust commitment to moral living, stern discipline of some who fell short, often tempered with a wish not to judge people in their absence but to give them opportunity to justify their behaviour. Furthermore, though discipline was applied, the way was usually open to reinstatement. Truss (Chapter 4) comments regarding the Yorkshire Wolds:

Lapses from this high and self imposed standard brought the individual and the society into disrepute and took the name of the Lord in vain. The moral rules were therefore strict and they were enforced. Drunkenness, blasphemy, dishonesty and sexual misdemeanours all resulted in expulsion, although members could be rehabilitated later after suitable repentance.

Preaching and evangelism: Villages, Hardship, “Poaching”

Sharp (1990) points out that from their early days, the PMs’ policy was not to bypass the villages in hope of greater success in the more populous towns, and that it was a policy which continued at least till about 1860, contrasting with the Wesleyan policy noted above. The missionaries went to the villages first, and moved from them into towns and cities. Petty wrote (1880:577):

certainly the Primitive Methodists cannot innocently withdraw any of their labours from villages and agricultural districts, leaving them entirely, as they would in many instances, to the superstitious errors of Puseyism, or to semi-heathen ignorance, and frightful forms of wickedness and vice.

Ritson (1911:127, 205) asserts that “Some of the most astonishing triumphs were won by the pioneers among the agricultural labourers in the south of England,” and continues:

The travelling preacher was the nucleus around which the organisation gathered. A number of places having been missioned, and regular preaching services arranged, they were placed upon the Plan⁵⁴, and supplied with preachers to conduct the services. The whole might consist of a dozen or twenty places or more, scattered over a considerable area of country.

A “mission” was subordinate to the circuit to which it belonged. In the January 1834 issue of the Magazine John Ride set out the policy of the Shefford Circuit⁵⁵, namely, that the evangelists should sweep the countryside, preaching at every place to which they came including any that seemed unlikely bear fruit. They were expected to preach eight times a week, including thrice on Sundays. Towns were to be preached in on Sundays. The Shefford Circuit was the root of the north Hampshire work. The article reads:

Every preacher sent out to mission, is to preach eight sermons a week, three on the Sabbath, and five on the week days; and as many more as he chooses.

Sometimes two preachers are sent out together; and sometimes one preacher is sent out by himself. If there be but one preacher, he takes up eight places, towns, villages, or neighbourhoods. He takes them without omitting any; so that his missionary range covers a certain part of the county; and he does not omit any particular place on account of it appearing to be unlikely; but sweeps the country as far as he goes.

His Sunday preaching is usually given to the towns, if there be any on his mission. And his preaching is almost uniformly in the open air, winter or summer.

After preaching he endeavours to obtain a house to hold a prayer meeting.

54 The plan (often, Plan) is the quarterly list of preaching appointments in a circuit.

55 Great Shefford, otherwise known as West Shefford, is about 8 miles north-west of Newbury.

In addition to these labours, he diligently visits from house to house and uses all other prudent means to bring forward the work of the Lord.

So soon as the work breaks out, he forms societies, and uses every means to cultivate the minds of the people, enlarge their experience, and improve⁵⁶ their talents. He meets the classes after preaching, and brings forward all he can to pray in the class meetings. So soon as any appear to have talents for further usefulness, they are formed in praying companies; and planned to hold meetings at different places on the Sundays. And this is also a nursery for local preachers.

If a place be long before a society be raised, they do not hastily give it up, but try every possible means to bring it forward.

When two preachers are sent out together, they take up sixteen places.

If grievous persecution breaks out at any place, it is made known, as soon as possible, through the circuit; and every society is engaged to pray for the particular place.

The Magazine editor adds a footnote inviting other circuits to send descriptions of their missionary systems, showing that Shefford's method, highly relevant to this study, was not necessarily followed nationwide. Nonetheless, a handwritten copy of an account by John Sadler (1806-1871) dated 1859, at Chester record office, says that "places were opened and societies formed around and adjacent to the metropolis of the County judging this to be the best plan to adopt before they assailed the City itself." Chester was first missioned in 1820.

Magazine (1837:334ff) contains the substance of an address by an unnamed speaker, delivered before the forming of the Society at Whitchurch. It was an *apologia* for PMism, and referred to the policies of going into the "highways and byways" and not "poaching" from other Christian communions. Together with Ride's 1834 article, it reminds readers of some of the hardships which ministers faced, and explains that PMism's

usual plan has been to send out missionaries in all directions, one, two or four in a place, as the circuits were able. These have to take the streets, lanes, fields, wastes, etc., in the towns and villages before them. They have sometimes to live upon the nuts and berries of the hedges; and have to accept, as a favour, a night's lodging upon a bench, or some chairs, or the fire

⁵⁶ i.e. develop and make use of

hearth, with a wisp of straw for a pillow. Sometimes they are not so fortunate as even this, but are bound to wander the roads, downs, fields, or woods until the morning.

As the missioning is generally commenced in the spring, it is commonly the case that before or by the winter following, the word has so far run as to induce some person to open his house for preaching, when a society is formed. In this county, however, we have had to preach, summer and winter, in the streets and lanes, for one, two, and three, and in your own streets nearly four years, before we get a place to hold so much as a prayer meeting.

The talk goes on to emphasise the Primitives' wish not to induce people to leave other churches if they have found Christ there. Parrott (1866:140-1) writes in similar vein:

justice, truth, and honour alike demand the record of plain facts, ... no man, no number of men previously projected or used means to unsettle or divide any church or community in order to form the Primitive Methodist Connexion, nor since its remarkable and unexpected germination into a veritable section⁵⁷ has it ever sought to molest or proselyte others, or to swell itself by amalgamation.

PM policies derived partly from the desire to evangelise places where people had the least opportunity of hearing the gospel. There may also have been an element of pragmatism, for the evangelists were less successful in larger towns during this early period.

Vickers (1987:144) says that "Primitive Methodist missions were focussed, at least initially, on places where there was either no Wesleyan society or an ineffectual one." Sheard (1980:123) writes, "All the evidence seems to substantiate the claim of the Ranters that they did not deliberately poach from other denominations." Currie (1967:65-73) argues that the PMs grew best in places where the Wesleyans were weak. This is borne out in Hampshire, where in the eighteenth century the Wesleyans thrived only in Whitchurch, as noted in Chapter 3B.

Magazine (1845:240) advises all preachers, local and itinerant, to arrive at least an hour early in the place where they are to preach and to do house to house visitation, and usually to conclude the service within seventy minutes.

57 sc. of the Christian Church

Camp Meetings

Reference to camp meetings will often be found in these chapters. The first camp meeting was held at Mow Cop in 1807, and the PMs became known as Camp Meeting Methodists, so characteristic of them was this form of gathering. PMHB gives a clear idea of how camp meetings were expected to run:

Camp Meetings open at 9 o'Clock in the morning, proceed with a variety of services, and close at 4 or 5 in the afternoon. Sometimes they stop an hour for dinner, and sometimes not. All the exercises in all the services must be short, as long exercises are peculiarly injurious at Camp Meetings.

They usually open with a prayer service for about 30 minutes. At half-past 9, preaching service. At a quarter past 10, praying service in companies. At a quarter before 11, either a preaching or a reading service. At half-past 11, praying service in companies; and so on, varying the exercises, in order that the attention and energy of the people may keep rising and increasing to the last.

PREACHING Services open with singing and prayer, and close with sermon or discourse. Two preachers should always stand up in each service; and no preacher should, on any account, be allowed to speak for more than twenty minutes in any one service. And a preaching service should scarcely ever be allowed to continue for more than 45 minutes. The preachers should take a clear pure course, and not make references to any preaching that has gone before or that is to follow after. Such references being mostly injurious.

READING services open with singing and prayer. One or two experiences are then read from the Magazines. The readers are allowed to comment a little as they go on. These services promote variety and are often very useful.

PRAYING services should be carefully supported. They are the chief strength of the Camp Meetings, and give energy and dignity to the whole. They are held in four different ways:

- 1. The general praying service at the opening.*
- 2. About a quarter past ten in the forenoon, a praying service should open in companies; but no company should be allowed to fix near the stand. The movements in this service, give variety, energy, and effort to the whole. If the congregation happen to be*

but small, they should nevertheless go out in companies, because the going out and coming in are a great relief both to body and mind; and are of great service to the people in other respects.

3. *When a praying service, in companies, has gone on, with energy, for half an hour, they are usually summoned to the preaching stand. But if the pious praying labourers happen to be engaged with mourners, then the next service must be deferred or put off as the case may require. Nevertheless, if circumstances render preaching necessary, then a permanent company is formed, and fixed at a suitable distance from the stand to pray for mourners; and this company does not break up for preaching. The permanent company is a relief to the whole; and all the other services proceed regularly as before.*
4. *Sometimes, when the work breaks out powerfully under preaching, it is found necessary to have a general praying service without going out in companies. In this case it is usual to make a ring or opening, and call up the mourners to be prayed for.*

Bebbington (2012:10) comments that “camp meetings illustrated the tendency in Methodism, English as well as American, to adopt new techniques so long as they harvested souls.”

Standards for the Ministry

If men's or women's abilities or sense of divine vocation drew them to the attention of the circuit quarterly meeting, they could be appointed as travelling preachers. High standards were expected of those who accepted this call. Brown (1980:128-33) has calculated that over 40% who set out in the ministry between 1831 and 1871 did not last for more than four years. For the decades 1831-1851, his calculation is that 38% ceased by the end of four years' service, and over 56% by the end of 14 years'. Some left for secular work, some resigned, some simply “vanished”. The work was arduous, especially for married men with families.

The questionnaire sent annually to the circuits to be returned to the connexional authorities has been preserved in the Andover Circuit reports. Here are some matters about which enquiries were made concerning a circuit's ministers:

- is he deemed capable of being a circuit superintendent

- is he attentive to discipline
 - is he a smoker
 - is he in debt
 - how many family visits did he make over the past year
 - is he peaceable
-
- is his preaching generally acceptable
 - is his preaching long
 - does he preach a full, free and present salvation
 - is he successful in the conversion of sinners
-
- his general conduct
 - is he attentive to chapel affairs
 - do his dress and hair conform to the rules
 - has he read all the Rules during each half of the past year
 - did he get the circuit books duly signed in his previous circuit.

In June 1844 the circuit resolved “That the Preachers, Local and Travelling, be requested to keep to scriptural Preaching and not to Philosophical Preaching.” Some observations may clarify the phrase “philosophical preaching.” Wesley expresses the matter thus in the Preface, dated 1747, to his 53 *Sermons on several Occasions*:

I design plain truth for plain people: therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasonings; ... I labour to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life; and, in particular, those kinds of technical terms that so frequently occur in Bodies of Divinity; ... which to common people are an unknown tongue.

Petty states, when writing of the coming of Samuel Heath and others into Wiltshire in the 1820s:

The PM missionaries stood up in the streets, and with fearless courage proclaimed the solemn truths of revelation. Multitudes were drawn by curiosity to listen to their orations, most of whom seldom entered church or chapel, and among whom fine language and smooth sentences would have been comparatively useless. To arrest their attention, these classes

required the important truths of the gospel delivered in plain, strong language, with homely illustrations, and with earnestness of manner and depth of feeling.

The *Primitive Methodist Preacher's Magazine* (June 1831:118) has an article "On Plainness of Preaching":

Let us remember that we do not mount the pulpit to say fine things, or eloquent things, we have there to proclaim the good tidings of salvation to fallen man, to point out the way of eternal life, to exhort, support, and to cheer the suffering sinner: these are the glorious topics on which we have to enlarge, and will these permit the tricks or oratory or the studied beauties of eloquence? Shall truths and counsels like these be couched in terms which the poor and ignorant cannot understand?

Magazine (1845:240) advises all preachers, local and itinerant, not to "recite elaborate and fine essays" and never to use unfamiliar vocabulary.

There was little formal education available to working class people in the period, and many preachers began with very little educational background. Travelling ministers did not receive formal training till 1865. William Mason, born on 17th October 1817 in Brandon, Lincolnshire, wrote in his 1877 autobiography⁵⁸:

During the winter of 1834 I was awakened to the fact that I was a sinner, and needed salvation. ... I went to Brandon, a distance of four miles, to hear a ploughman preach. None of the preachers I had heard seemed to do me any good, as they were too high for me; but this man in a smock frock preached the simple story of the Cross. I walked back with him to Claypole and heard him again at night, and in the prayer meeting I found what I had long been seeking - the pearl of great price, - and I rejoiced in sins forgiven... I united with the Primitive Methodist Church.

Thompson (1939:208) describes local preachers, mainly farm labourers or small shopkeepers: "There was something fine about their discourses, as they raised their voices in rustic eloquence and testified to the cleansing power of 'the Blood', forgetting themselves and their own imperfections of speech in their ardour."

58 *A Primitive Methodist Soldier in the British Army* (1877. Leeds, UK: James Trafford))

Long preaching was not appreciated. PMHB:viii states that “a sermon or discourse is delivered, for about twenty, or from that to thirty minutes. It should scarce ever exceed thirty minutes.” John Ride was instructed at the December 1839 Reading Circuit quarterly meeting to “admonish Edward Long for Long Preaching.”

The Consolidated Minutes (1849:29-31) require the preachers’ quarterly meeting to inquire into the doctrine, pulpit capabilities, and moral and official conduct of all the preachers and exhorters, and when the meeting entertained doubts as to the prudence of any preacher continuing on the Plan, the matter was to be transferred to the circuit quarterly meeting. People were removed from the Plan for moral or doctrinal reasons; this study discovered none removed for inadequate “pulpit capabilities.” It is conceivable that they were not admitted in the first place unless they had already proven themselves to have the required gifts.

Travelling preachers (Minutes 1836:35) were required to provide a journal recording their activities to the circuit committee monthly or as otherwise directed. There are many references to these journals in this thesis. Nuttall (1967) points out that they are another instance of PM imitation of Quaker practice.

Financial Support

Ritson (1911:206) wrote:

Directly a circuit found itself in possession of a small balance, it turned its attention to the work of missioning new ground, so as to form new societies and new circuits. A missionary would be sent forth on this work if the place to be dealt with happened to be distant.

In some cases he would be promised a small salary; in others he would be expected to find his own.

Magazine (1879:434-6) says of Hampshire minister Thomas Jackson: “He knew ministers of the strictest integrity and uprightness who were often puzzled and perplexed in trying to unite two seeming impossibilities, how to educate and feed their children and ‘make both ends meet’ with their small income.”

Ride's article in the Magazine (1834:102-3), describing the policy of the Shefford Circuit, states that "when the missionary has preached a quarter at his eight places, he makes a general collection at every place, for the support of the mission; and this seldom fails paying his salary, and sometimes it does more. And in like manner he makes a collection at the end of each quarter." This is because he "is expected to live on⁵⁹ his mission. ... if he conducts himself properly, it is found that almost uniformly, the Lord opens the way both for food and lodging. But still he must expect privations." Thus, prior to the establishment of a circuit, as indicated by the terms 'Mission' or 'Branch', there was a certain amount of risk. Ministers were paid by the circuit once it had been established. (A *branch*, as defined in the 1849 Consolidated Minutes, was that part of a circuit which had its own preachers' plan and quarterly accounts, committee and steward. It was analogous to a circuit.) The amount of the salary was set out in the minutes of Conference for married preachers, single male preachers, and female preachers, and raised by the circuits.

When Elizabeth Smith set out as a travelling preacher⁶⁰ she was told, "You must raise your own salary." She asked what it was, and was told, "Two guineas for the quarter." Her reply was, "O, I did not know that I should have anything." Russell wrote under the date 7th February 1831:

It was much now on my mind to fully go into a fresh line of labour in Hampshire; ... So I offered to go on the new ground at my own risk, and thus to bear the cost or loss, if the new ground did not raise my salary. Hence my application to quarter-day was complied with, and I began to make arrangements accordingly.

Profit on sale of books from the PM book room was part of their means of raising their support.

Ritson (1911:208-9) comments on the system as follows:

The process of weeding out the unfit was aided by the hardships to be endured and the small salaries that were paid. ... A "young man," or probationer, was an additional labourer on a field perhaps that had hitherto only sufficed to maintain one or two preachers, as the case may be. The additional man was expected so to develop the field already occupied, as to maintain himself or break up new ground with the same result. In circuits that had become organised, and were simply requiring additional ministerial labour on the existing area of operations, the salary paid was not calculated to tempt the self-seeking and luxurious. It was

⁵⁹ i.e. *off*

⁶⁰ Russell (2005:180)

£24 a year if they managed to get it, and out of this they had to pay for board and lodging. A female travelling preacher received £16 a year...

Often the people were so poor that they failed to raise even the small salaries allowed. ... If it be remembered that ... farm labourers received seven shillings a week and board, this is not surprising. When in the forties the salaries of married ministers were by Conferential enactment raised to nineteen shillings a week, it almost created a rebellion in some quarters. Permitted, rather than enacted, would be the more correct word in relation to the action of Conference.

Watts (1995:253-4) writes that the pay of married PM itinerants did not improve till 1845 when it was increased from £36/8/- to £49/8/- per annum. In the 1830s there was an allowance of 1/6 (7½p) a week for children, whilst unmarried preachers received “as little as the poorest agricultural labourers.” The Connexion began to provide horses in the 1840s.

Licensing

Under the Toleration Act of 1689, preachers who dissented from the Established Church had to be licensed at the Quarter Sessions, local courts held quarterly in each county. Hatcher explains⁶¹: “Primitive Methodist itinerants made a declaration before a justice of the peace that they were indeed ‘Protestant’ through and through. They received a piece of paper, ‘the licence’, confirming that they had made the declaration, and this could be of help to the preachers if subsequently they were caught up in tricky situations.” Russell relates (2005:20) under 17th January 1830: “One night, while preaching by star-light, I threw up a quantity of blood, ... But the journeying thirty miles to Salisbury over the plain, to get a license, with snow ankle deep on the ground, made it tiresome after my night’s sickness.”

Exhorters, Local Preachers, Prayer Leaders

These offices appear frequently in the narrative. OLD explains that:

61 email, 11.2.13

Exhorters played an important part in early Methodism by encouraging their hearers in word and by prayer. Preachers began as exhorters, speaking in a class meeting and then to the society, usually warning against sin and urging repentance. ... The crucial transition from exhorting to preaching came when an exhorter, whether male or female, 'took a text' and expounded it.

A 'local preacher' is a lay person whose preaching takes place mainly within the circuit in which he or she is a member. Local preachers were sometimes planned to take services on the same Sunday in more than one place close enough to each other to make it feasible. They could also be hired, for example if there was a temporary shortfall in the number of travelling preachers, if an itinerant were ill, or if a period of special effort was envisaged.

The quarterly meetings of Micheldever and Andover had to deal frequently with the problem of local preachers not turning up for their preaching appointments: Sheard (1980:701-2), Morris (1967) and Garratt (2002) discovered the same problem. The Mitcheldever Circuit Plans for 1837 and 1838 contain this regulation (# 9):

WEATHER Where the preaching is in-doors, no weather can excuse except such as renders the roads impassable; or rain descending in drenching torrents. Where it is out-of-doors the case is different. - But as we have much out-of-door preaching, it would be well for the preacher to attend, where the congregation is at all steady and promising; as in such circumstances, sometimes a house is opened.

A Report by Hugh Bourne, quoted in Russell (1886:334), was published following an 1832 visit to the Shefford Circuit in which he writes of Prayer Leaders: "the idea of planning prayer leaders or praying companies. ... two in a company. ... the praying companies taking the work usually done by local preachers. ... their exercises were to be short, and they were to sing, or pray, or speak as they thought best. ... and the system proved an excellent nursery for local preachers, a number of whom were soon raised up, and they have now on the plan forty-eight local preachers and exhorters, and about thirteen praying companies."

Services

The PM *Preacher's Magazine* (September 1829:78-9) describes the regular services, called preaching services. They usually opened with singing, prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and a short time of further singing. A sermon of 20- to 30-minutes' length followed, or, if there were two preachers, each might preach for 15 or 20 minutes. The service closed with singing and prayer, having taken up to 75 minutes. Sometimes it would be followed by a prayer meeting for about 20 minutes, including more singing. "If souls are in distress, and the pious praying labourers are engaged with mourners," the prayer service could be prolonged, but the preacher should announce from the pulpit at a proper time that people with family commitments were free to leave. "If this be omitted," it adds, "trouble usually follows." A frequent motif throughout this thesis is the PMs' engagement in individual and corporate prayer.

The Love-feast

Lovefeasts feature repeatedly in the narrative in coming chapters. OLD explains succinctly:

Early Methodists celebrated the Love-feast with 'a little plain cake and water', together with singing and testimony. Admission was by class ticket or by a note from an itinerant.

They were led by an itinerant, or occasionally by a local preacher, but only if specifically authorized by the Superintendent minister.

The Love-feast continued in all the various branches of nineteenth-century Methodism, notably among the Primitive Methodists, who held quarterly love-feasts well into the second half of the century.

PMHB describes lovefeasts as practised among the PMs:

Lovefeasts usually open with singing and prayer. A piece is then sung by way of asking a blessing; after which the bread and water are served out, the love feast collection is made, and a piece sung by way of returning thanks. The preacher makes a few remarks; the people rise in succession, and speak their own experience; and distant comers sometimes say a little about the works of God in other places. But none are allowed to run into useless exhortations, drag out to tedious lengths, or speak unprofitably of others; and above all not to reflect upon

or find fault, either with individuals or societies. And it is the preacher's painful duty to stop all who attempt to trespass. He has to preserve the Lovefeast in its clear and pure course, in order that the people may grow into faith, and that the Holy Ghost may descend.

Singing and prayer are occasionally introduced; and the lovefeast finally closes with prayer.

Minor (1982:144) wrote: "The testimonies were intended to build up the faith of existing members, but they did sometimes lead to conversions and to scenes of considerable excitement." Lovefeasts were very popular, and attempts were needed to limit attendance to members of the society, or to people with a note admitting them. When non-members gained entry, it often led to commitment to membership.

It has sometimes been speculated whether the lovefeast fulfilled the rôle of the Eucharist in members' minds. Tiller (2006:97) writes: "Love-feasts were in effect an alternative to celebration of the Lord's Supper," and Hatcher (1993:361-3) notes that emphasis on the Lord's Supper increased in the second half of the century whilst the lovefeast was in decline. What went on in people's minds must remain no more than speculation, but it was not the authorities' intention that the lovefeast should be a formal substitute for the Lord's Supper. There was no question of the bread's being intended to function as the housel.

This thesis argues that the warm fellowship and sense of belonging found in PMism contributed in no small measure to its inner life and to its attractiveness to others in the troubled agrarian society of the time.

Holy Communion

The 1849 Consolidated Minutes state that the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper must be administered "to such of our societies, at least, as desire it, and by such persons as the respective quarterly meetings shall appoint." It became normal in the circuit head chapel to celebrate the Lord's Supper once a quarter. This implies that the Eucharist played a less important rôle among the PMs than among the Wesleyans, with their direct Anglican origin, and that there was no sacerdotal character ascribed to it.

The Magazine (1841:355-6) has a long section entitled *On the Sacramental Cup*:

We have no direct scripture warrant for calling it wine. The Jews, both in America and in England, make their pure Passover wine, by pouring water on raisins.

Take one pound of good raisins. Cut each raisin into two or three pieces; our people usually cut them with scissars. Put them into an earthen vessel, and pour upon them three pints of boiling water. Cover them up, and set them warm, and let them stand all day and all night. Then strain off the wine, and bottle it up. It should always be made new for the sacrament, and never kept longer than a week.

At Reading, our Sister Ride⁶² purchased six pounds of good raisins, which cost two shillings and nine-pence. We⁶³ used I believe about six bottles; and there was a good portion left. The wine was allowed on all hands to be excellent.

The Reading Circuit quarterly meeting resolved in December 1842 “That we recomend the Raisin Wine for the Sacrament in all the Societies in this Circuit.” The assertion that “We have no direct scripture warrant for calling it wine” is consonant with the increasing denominational commitment to teetotalism, but is a piece of sophistry, for the scripture plainly records that some were consuming too much eucharistic wine and becoming drunk⁶⁴.

Class Meetings and Membership

Class meetings were a general feature of Methodism. A significant feature of PMism in Hampshire, they were another context in which the conviviality of the movement was experienced. Parrott (1866:127-8) wrote:

A Class is a company of believers who meet weekly for spiritual worship and mutual improvement in Christian knowledge and holiness. One of their number is denominated “Leader,” and when practicable he has an assistant. ... Meeting in Class, when health and circumstances allow it, is a condition of membership.

62 John Ride was stationed in Reading at the time

63 The 22nd Connexional Conference was held at Reading in June 1841

64 1 Corinthians 11:21

The weekly class meeting was a devotional gathering designed to promote growth in holiness. Minor (1982:143-4) describes the class meeting among early PMs in these words:

The atmosphere here was one of spontaneous testimony and mutual confession, and as well as answering the leader's questions about their spiritual experience the members would join in hymns and extempore prayers. Here was a group in which was the mutual acceptance and mutual openness which has always characterized the Church at its best.

PMHB:ix-x gives a detailed outline of a typical PM class meeting:

1. *Open with singing for about 4, 5, or 6 minutes.*
2. *Let 4 or 5 minutes be spent in prayer ending with the Lord's prayer.*
3. *Sing about 2 or 3 minutes.*
4. *Leader speak 1 or 2 minutes, chiefly his own experience.*
5. *Let 15, or from that to 20 minutes be spent in conversation of the leader with the members. And, to keep the attention alive, the leader, during the conversation, may if he chooses, give out one or two verses, and sing.*
6. *If a class have 15 or 16 members, the average time of speaking should be about one minute with each member. If there be 20 or 30 members the time should be less, because in speaking to one, the leader, in effect, speaks to all. In particular cases, more time may be spent with any member.*
7. *If any member have acquired or be acquiring a habit of long speaking, then the leader, after dropping a word or two, should immediately pass on to the next, and begin, at once, to speak to the next. If this be not attended to the meeting will soon be injured.*
8. *When the speaking is concluded, sing for 2, 3, or 4 minutes.*
9. *Then let the members pray in quick succession, for about 2 or three minutes each. The leaders must take care that none of them trespass upon time. Also, one or two verses, may be occasionally sung, to vary the exercises.*
10. *Be careful and exact in settling the class paper.*
11. *Conclude in an hour, or an hour and a quarter.*

12. This outline may be judiciously varied in any point, as circumstances may require.

13. If a class be met by a preacher, after preaching, he may begin the conversation without previous singing and prayer, and go through this service in 15 minutes, or not exceed 20 minutes.

The 1836 Consolidated Minutes (pages 57-8) say that the leader should accustom himself to short speaking, and if the class is large, very short, and should train members to pray in quick succession for no longer than a minute each, though they might pray twice if the class was small.

Membership of a class was the way into a society. Quarterly tickets were issued by ministers, whose duty was to explore with each member his or her spiritual condition and progress. Members ‘on trial’ (Conference Minutes 1831:3) were required to give three months’ evidence of good conduct before admission to full membership, and full members were expected to give a penny a week “if they can afford it” (Minutes 1819:11).

Prayer Meetings

PMHB states that “prayer meetings are introduced after preachings, with very great success. The prayer meeting usually commences at the conclusion of the preaching service, and is carried on for about twenty minutes. On some occasions, when circumstances warrant it, the prayer meeting begins immediately after sermon, and forms a part of the preaching service.” Instructions for the prayer meeting are remarkably precise; PMHB lays down:

The outline is as follows:

- 1. Open with singing for about 4, 5, or 6 minutes*
- 2. Spend 4, 5, or 6 minutes in prayer, ending with the Lord’s prayer.*
- 3. Sing for about 2, 3, or 4 minutes.*
- 4. Let the members of the society pray in quick succession, for about 2, 3, or 4 minutes each; with singing a verse or two, occasionally, to vary the exercises.*
- 5. In praying with mourners, or in other particular cases, the exercises may be lengthened. But, in general, long exercises, in public, are injurious, and should be carefully avoided.*

And if any one trespass, by attempting to drag out to an improper length, then the leaders' meeting, or some other official authority, may determine what remedy shall be applied to such impropriety.

6. *If exhortations be given, they may be from 2 or 3, to 6 or 8 minutes each.*
7. *Conclude in an hour, or an hour and a quarter.*
8. *On suitable occasions, prayer may again commence, and especially if there be souls in distress.*
9. *This outline may be judiciously varied in any point as circumstances may require.*

PMHB adds that it was customary for people to kneel in prayer, except “in the open air, if the ground be wet or unsuitable, the kneeling be sometimes dispensed with.”

PMs' belief in a God who answers prayer was integral to the spirit and expectations of the movement, and will receive attention in Chapter 6A. Barber (1932)⁶⁵ asked of PMism nationally, “What was the secret of this phenomenal progress?” and offers some answers:

These men lived in conscious intimacy with God - they had found the secret place of the Most High.

They were men of prayer who pleaded until they got the victory; and the burden of prayer was ever the salvation of souls. Doubtless they lacked many things, but they were clothed with the Spirit's might.

Farndale (1950:69-70) expresses this aspect of the “secret of Mow Cop” as follows:

By experience Hugh Bourne and his friends had learnt that essential as individual prayer must ever be, yet in the economy of grace there is a special value in group prayer. ... That brings us back to the original conception of Mow Cop as 'a whole day for praying'. Again and again Hugh Bourne recalled his people from excess of preaching over praying.

Their earnestness to attract the attention and blessing of God moved them on occasions to combine fasting with prayer. In the 1834-5 Shefford PM Circuit Plan is a notice that “Friday, October 11th, will be observed as a day of *fasting and prayer to Almighty God*, for the *prosperity* of the work and the *deliverance* of His people.” In June 1843 the Reading Circuit decided at its quarterly meeting

⁶⁵ Harrison, Barber, Hornby, Davies (1932:103-111)

“That a Day of Fasting and Prayer be held throughout the Circuit for a Revival of the work of God.” And again at their quarterly meeting in June 1845: “That a Day of fasting and prayer be appointed throughout the Circuit.”

PMs ascribed the effectiveness of their ministry to the working of God. Ritson (1911:130) confirms this when describing a time of prayer Ride and Russell had in February 1830: “Russell walked ten miles to this meeting for consultation and prayer. ... they threw themselves on their knees amid the snow and pleaded with God to give them Berkshire. The round of prayer lasted for hours.” The 1838 Andover Circuit report⁶⁶ says:

God in answer to the united, fervent, and persevering prayers of his believing and obedient followers, has poured down his Holy Spirit on various parts of the circuit; many sinners have been converted to God, genuine piety has increased among believers, and much prejudice has been removed from the minds of the people.

66 Magazine (1838:424)

B: THE BEGINNING OF TRANSITION

Things were changing nationally by mid-century. Sheard (1980:559) observed: “By 1844 the initial surge in Primitive Methodist recruitment was over. ... and although new places were opened after that, the Ranters looked almost as much to their own ranks and the children of their own members for new recruits.” Transitions are gradual, not always perceived at the time, and are not usually susceptible to exact chronology. This section focuses on the transition in the movement which was noticeable from about the mid 1840s and continued beyond the terminus of this study.

John Flesher became the Connexion’s most influential figure and superintended a transition from a loosely joined evangelistic movement to connexionalism. Circuit missions were gradually handed over to the connexional missionary committee. The Book Room and the executive were moved to London, marking a shift from the rural character of the denomination, concurrent with a national exodus from the villages and the growth of towns. Such changes marked a change of denominational self-perception.

Lysons (2001) identifies a number of features in the transition which he dates from 1843 and which, consonant with standard sociological theory, he calls “From Sect to Denomination”, including:

- greater material prosperity among members
- chapel building
- formal ministerial training
- a shift from revivalism to entertainment and social life
- the beginning of humanitarian and political activity
- centralisation.

In the nation a demographic shift was occurring from rural to urban population from mid-century: in 1851 only half the population was urban, whereas by 1901 it was four-fifths. People felt more secure, with, *inter alia*, increased prosperity and medical knowledge, and were less inclined to seek comfort in religion. Growing prestige enjoyed by scientists and other experts diverted people’s minds away from ministers for solutions to their problems, or for comfort within them. The rise of universal education and of the welfare state made the churches’ educational contributions less

necessary. Leisure became more widely available from the 1870s, making chapel life less of an attraction to those not drawn primarily by its message of salvation.

Magazine (1845:240) reminds travelling and local preachers that “the souls of ploughmen, ditchers, cartmen, blacksmiths, stone-breakers, pitmen, and others of the same class, are as precious in the sight of God as those of monarchs, statesmen and philosophers,” suggesting that the predominantly rural working class ethos of the movement was beginning to break down.

Hempton (2005:182-7) identifies three main areas of causation for the changes and decline which set in with PMism. Firstly, it was a transition from a revivalist sect to an established denomination. First and second generations challenge the existing religious establishment, emphasising personal commitment and egalitarian engagement of all members. Subsequent generations concentrate more on building an infrastructure to sustain growth, and then begin to conform to the values their forebears rejected, becoming more respectable and less distinctive. A second clutch of causes is moral and spiritual failures and mistaken policies. In the case of PMism, itinerancy, class meetings and camp meetings all declined in quality whilst simultaneously chapel debts demanded sustained effort. Thirdly, Methodism had been well adapted to previous situations, for it could be viewed as a religious form of enlightenment in the age of the Enlightenment (voluntary association in a time of crisis for religious establishments, free market religion when free market economies were developing, religious democratisation in a period of democratic revolutions). But it became less appealing in the age of industrialisation, urbanisation, and secularisation.

Garratt (2002:227-9, 248) notes that in 1840, “It is clear therefore that there had been a definite shift in focus; the desire for continued evangelistic outreach being relinquished in favour of the maintenance of existing local institutions. ... While a gradual decline of outward expansion can be witnessed in the Ludlow circuit from 1840, in other circuits this process began later.” She summarised trends in Shropshire thus:

During the first half of the century, Primitive Methodist circuits often covered huge expanses of territory, and were made up of scores of preaching places, as travelling preachers and missionaries attempted to form societies in many different locations. However, as a core of viable societies was established and these were given permanency as a result of chapel building, the nature of missionary activity changed and the work of the circuit became increasingly inward looking.

Raising Money

Debt on chapel buildings became a problem among the PMs, and a new motif appeared in the Magazine reports: the collection. It has been repeatedly observed that “a home for preaching was crucial”⁶⁷. Sheard (1980:841) writing of Cheshire and Lancashire, observes the same: “a large number of places were eventually abandoned for want of a cottage or room. In many of these, no foothold was ever obtained.” Members could be evicted from tied cottages for holding meetings in their homes. Parrott (1866) estimated that for every believer acquired from other denominations, at least twenty converts had defected to other churches, especially “in the commencement of our labours, in almost every locality, prior to our obtaining comfortable chapels.”

A chapel implied success and prestige. It gave a conspicuous presence in a community, and could be fitted up for religious meetings without need to bring or rearrange the various accoutrements of services for every meeting. It provided more room than a cottage, without inconvenience to family life. Woodcock (1889:258) wrote: “if we are to work and influence people permanently for good, we shall be largely dependent upon suitable places of worship. In villages where we have no such places our cause is liable to great fluctuation, if not to sudden extinction.” There were both advantages and disadvantages to the acquisition of a chapel. As Garratt (2002:152, 246-7) explains, cottage meetings or other temporary buildings ensured considerable flexibility, yet without a chapel the PMs’ activities were vulnerable to opposition from landowners or clergy, adding, “Throughout the county and indeed the country, scores of Primitive Methodist societies were given up as circuits became increasingly centred upon their chapels. ... there was a dramatic reduction in the number of societies without a permanent place of worship during the final decades of the century.”

The 1841 Magazine reports at length on The Golden System for raising funds. Tonks (1907:129-30) records how it arose from a debt of £245 on the 1838 chapel at Wootton Bassett. The Magazine writing on this scheme bears the name of Hugh Bourne himself. Chapels, it says, were supported financially throughout the Connexion by seat-rents and anniversary collections, plus other means if these fell short. But now he recommends the new System, as funds were often short. This system “has proved itself to be most excellent for lowering chapel debts, and raising chapels out of their difficulties.” It could be adopted without discontinuing other means; indeed, “let all the other means be strictly and diligently kept up.”

67 Hatcher (1993:224)

Individuals promised to raise support for the chapel's funds, and their names would be taken down along with a note of the amount promised. The money was to be raised by begging or collection, or given from the person's personal money, "or raised in such ways as Divine Providence opens before them". It could be paid to the treasurer once a week, once a fortnight, once a month, as it came in, or annually at the chapel anniversary. The Magazine gives detailed rules for accounting. The names were to be taken down immediately after the collection, or, at preaching services, immediately after the sermon. There was to be as strenuous an effort as possible to canvass new names "at other times, in their houses or anywhere. ... for months if they can."

After the success of the system at Wootton Bassett following the 1839-41 anniversaries, the Magazine suggested that "this system is likely soon to be in all the chapels in the Brinkworth circuit."

Money was also raised by begging tours around the societies, and the 1840s Oswestry Circuit account book shows profits from tea meeting tickets, donations at tea meetings, the Golden System, and pew rents. The 1849 consolidated minutes (page 68) recommend preachers and members not to encourage tea parties except for Sunday schools, but the following year's minutes (page 18) permit tea meetings "for other connexional purposes" if the quarterly meeting or circuit committee grants permission. From the mid 1840s the Magazine carries greater emphasis on chapel anniversary meetings, collections and tea meetings. Minor (1982:142) perceptively observes:

Many congregations built chapels that they could not really afford, and found themselves for years raising money to pay off the debts. I would contend that this chapel-building had some effect in draining spiritual resources and transforming Primitive Methodism's relations with the local communities. Whereas once the Primitives were eager for their neighbours' souls, latterly they were more eager for their pennies to help reduce or liquidate the chapel debt.

Sheard (1980:408, 873-6, 883) writes concerning the mid 1830s: "A legacy of chapel debts and associated difficulties was to hamper the development of both Bolton and Bury circuits for the next two decades," and adds:

In some cases the liability ran to hundreds of pounds, and it was as much as the society could do to keep up the interest payments. Several failed. ... Several chapels built with great optimism became millstones to societies which, for one reason or another failed to develop.

It became a matter of course when building was projected for preachers and leaders to beg throughout the neighbourhood, and for circulars to be printed reminding the inhabitants of the connexion's valuable contribution to improving the moral tone of the nation, and particularly of the 'labouring class' in the locality. The appeal was clearly directed at the more respectable sector of society, and to wealthy members of other denominations.

Energy, which twenty years earlier would have been devoted mainly to such things as lovefeasts and prayer meetings, in the 1840s and 1850s was bestowed increasingly on the upkeep of buildings.

Vickers (1987:426) explains that the long-standing debts from building schemes led to greater dependence on pew rents and more frequent appeals and financial efforts. *The Ranters' Digest*, (Spring 2013:16-17), reports:

In the mid nineteenth century, the denomination had entered a period of expansion that saw the construction of a vast number of churches, chapels and Sunday schools. By 1870, the movement had built more than three thousand chapels, ... The debts spiralled. By 1890, the Church owed over £1 million.

The photographs in the Appendix illustrate the simplicity of the architecture of Hampshire's early chapels, necessitated by the people's poverty. Hatcher (1993:555) comments, "It appears that in the end it was the chapel building rather than the intellectual adjustment that most debilitated Primitive Methodism. ... The continuing need for chapel debt reduction was a matter of growing embarrassment, and in some instances directed energies to financial ends for as long as two or three generations."

Changes in Evangelism and Sanctification

Obelkevich records that missioning and remissioning continued into the period 1840-60, but less frequently and less vigorously; they were overshadowed by the rise of "revivalism", namely, efforts in a place where an existing congregation was declining or had grown lukewarm, to revive it by prayer and renewed efforts, to gain new converts and to rekindle members' zeal. Focus turned more to the chapel and there was more concentration on winning children, especially where there was a Sunday school.

“Protracted meetings” played a part in this effort. They were introduced in the 1840s, especially following one at Congleton which ended on New Year’s Day 1839 with sixty conversions, and was reported in the April Magazine. A chapel was open for up to a week every day or every evening, and one or two people would be present at all times. Minor (1982:144) describes them thus:

a series of nightly meetings in a particular chapel lasting a week or longer and with a different preacher or preachers each night. Usually held in December or January in rural areas when agricultural work was lighter, these meetings were largely intended to revive the lukewarm piety of those already “in”, although they did succeed in bringing in outsiders and led to conversions.

Ambler (1989:74) explains them as of American origin, “consecutive nightly meetings in a chapel lasting for a week or two and sometimes longer with a different preacher or preachers each night - and the employment of revivalists. ... clearly designed to strengthen existing institutions rather than transform them.” This kind of revivalism was likely to gain converts from among people who had some prior link with PMism, perhaps via Sunday school or family members, or those who attended but were not members. Truss (Chapter 4) comments: “They began to regard their Hearers and the children of members as their primary recruitment material rather than the wider world beyond.”

Garratt (2002:229) writes: “While the drive to recruit new converts was still very much alive after 1850, missionary activity increasingly took the form of carefully planned revival and protracted meetings,” and supplies examples from a range of circuits.

As the decades passed, the PMs’ view of the origin and nature of revival changed. The Magazine (1845:112ff) reports that the Andover Circuit September 1844 quarterly meeting appointed fourteen “revival meetings” for the following three months. This use of the word *revival* demonstrates a semantic shift from the classic meaning. James Caughey, a Methodist Episcopal minister, and Charles Finney toured England 1841-7 and 1849-51 respectively but did not, as far as this research has discovered, visit northern Hampshire. Finney’s itinerary was mainly among Baptists and Congregationalists. Nonetheless, their influence nationally contributed to the PMs’ evolving understanding of the origin and nature of revival, and to their transition from the expansionist to the revivalist period.

Ward (1972:287-8) expresses it thus:

The 'forties and 'fifties marked the watershed between revival and revivalism. ... the native springs of spontaneous revival were drying up. Whether the proper answer to the drought was the organised oversight of the Pastoral Office, or an organised assault upon the hard ground which now resisted the gospel seed, informed by that analysis of the laws of the spiritual world developed in America by Finney and others, was a serious question;

This “organised assault” took the form of new American means to promote revival such as protracted meetings and a public call for commitment. Carwardine (2006) studied this in depth, concluding that by the 1850s most churches had adopted a more calculated revivalism in which the desired effect was worked up rather than prayed down. The approach can largely be traced to the influence of Caughey and Finney. Finney’s *Lectures on Revivals* were published in 1835 in America, and by 1850, as Bebbington (1989) records, over 80,000 copies had been sold in Britain, whilst Caughey claimed 20,000 conversions during his first visit to Britain, mainly Ireland (where he was born in 1810) and the industrial North and Midlands.

Preaching became more theatrical, and prayer was often made, in long prayer meetings, for the conversion of named individuals. The “anxious seat” was introduced, where mourners came for counsel and prayer, and would be expected to be converted. It could seem as if the Spirit of God now took second place to the preacher.

The greatest catalyst was Finney. Knight (2008:130) writes, “In keeping with his belief that revival was something which could be manufactured ... rather than being a mysterious gift ... Finney pioneered a much more orchestrated approach, known as ‘new measure’ revivalism.” She lists careful planning, nightly meetings over several weeks, and the anxious bench at which workers would pray with people desiring to respond to the Gospel. Though not the inventor of the new means, it was largely he who popularised them, not so much by his presence as by his writings. Finney wrote in his *Revivals of Religion: Lectures* (London, UK: Morgan & Scott (1910 edition:5)): “A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense.” He did, on the same page, acknowledge the need for God’s blessing: “But means will not produce a revival, we all know, without the blessing of God. No more will grain, when it is sown, produce a crop without the blessing of God.”

The PM Magazine serialised the Lectures in 1838-9. The May 1843 issue (page 347) says:

The established connexion between the use of appropriate means and the result, or between cause and effect, is of the most encouraging nature to rigorous and persevering effort to bring sinners to God. "I believe," says the Rev. C. G. Finney, "that the connexion between the right use of means to save sinners, and the accomplishment of that important end, is as philosophically sure, as between the right use of means to raise grain and a crop of wheat. ... I have seldom seen an individual fail, when he used the means for promoting a revival, or the conversion of sinners, in earnest, in the manner pointed out in the word of God."

Thus revival came to be seen as subject to human promotion and control.

The period also brought change in the perception of entire sanctification. As Knight (2008:134-5, 147) points out, during Caughey's six-year itineration in the north of England he claimed not only to have won over 20,000 converts, but also to have brought 9,000 people into entire sanctification. He believed that justification was insufficient for biblical Christian experience, that entire sanctification was also necessary. Finney shared the conviction, and their influence wrought a redefinition of Wesley's doctrine such that the experience came to be viewed as an essential second stage in the Christian life. Caughey, Knight explains, saw the experience as "a quick fix which could be rapidly offered ... obtained through a deliberate act of will and without the need for a long search ... a much more shallow version."

Women Preachers

Female local preachers continued to be extensively used throughout the period, but the number of female itinerants was severely reduced from the mid-1830s, as discussed in Chapter 7C.

Numerical Decline

The 1853 Conference reported a connexional decrease of 1051 members. The response was admirable, though the decrease was a harbinger of things to come:

The Conference appoints a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer, to be held on the 4th of October 1853, on account of our decrease, and in order to promote spiritual and numerical prosperity, which it hopes will be devoutly observed throughout all the Connexion, and that the God of all grace will mercifully hear the united supplications of the societies, and vouchsafe rich effusions of the Holy Spirit through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

Hampshire

Hampshire circuits and societies were affected by this transition. The aggregate membership figures for the settlements in this thesis in the Mitcheldever Circuit for 1842 (Sherfield Green, Stratfield Saye, Hurstbourne Priors, Micheldever, Dummer, North Waltham, Basingstoke) and 1848 (which added Ellisfield and Newnham) fell from 173 to 162, partly through the loss of 18 to America and 2 to London. Basingstoke grew from 12 to 30, and Hurstbourne Priors from 7 to 10. The addition of Ellisfield and Newnham contributed 14 members. All the other societies that existed in 1842 decreased by 1848. This suggests a picture of incipient decline in the villages despite some continued expansion into new places. The only other towns in the circuit were Winchester and Odiham, the former declining from 9 to 7 members, the latter from 12 to 11, making it hard to extrapolate a significant change of focus from villages to towns such as the denomination adopted later in its history. The Andover Circuit's quarterly meeting of September 1844 resolved on a fast throughout the circuit for a revival of religion: they were sensing decline and the need to revitalise momentum in expansion by earnest supplication.

Raising Money

Edward Bishop's Journal⁶⁸ records a missionary meeting at Sherfield Green in May 1837. "We had a large congregation, good attendance, a blessed influence, and a good collection." (A "missionary meeting" was a meeting at which evangelistic progress was reported.)

The Magazine (1839:419-20) reported that the Newbury chapel debt, after re-opening following the insertion of a gallery, was reduced to £63.10.9. John Ride reported in the 1841 Magazine that "the Golden System has brought in £8 for Silchester chapel; and we expect a deal more next year." The

⁶⁸ quoted in the Magazine 1837

Magazine (1842:100) reports a debt of £490 on Andover chapel and house in mid-1840 and adds, “the whole that had ever been raised came to about one third short of the interest.” The 1844 Magazine (page 460) laments that “The debt on Andover chapel has been burdensome ever since its erection; but efforts are in progress.” The 1846 Magazine reports that the cost of Newnham chapel was £103, “towards which a considerable part has been obtained, and ere long a third part will be realized.” The Magazine (1852:181) believes that the whole cost of the premises at Charter Alley would be about £200, adding these words of Edward Bishop: “We are persevering in our exertions to augment the subscription list, and indulge the hope, that we shall ultimately reach the safe mark.”

Chapel schedules for 1852-3 list the following debts when chapels were built in the area of this study; the second column gives the number of members when built; the third the population when built:

Andover	£320	31	4941
Facombe	£65	18	200
St Mary Bourne	£126	35	1300
Ashmansworth	£90	18	200
Littledown	£140	20	200

Chapel debt for the whole circuit was £2123. The smallest was Allington at £13.

The 1846 Magazine reports a course of evangelistic meetings at Andover, Wherwell and elsewhere attended by crowded and delighted congregations, when several mourners were restored to peace with God, the flame of evangelistic zeal was rekindled in the hearts of rich, poor, male and female, and the converting work was progressing encouragingly. A list of collections is included, and the same Magazine, after a stirring narrative of suffering, hardship, and perseverance at Newnham adds: “The congregations were large and the collections liberal. The golden system was introduced, and more than £12 were promised for the first anniversary.”

Typical is a note concerning the October 1846 chapel anniversary at Reading in the Magazine (1846:755): “Although the day was very rainy the sum realized exceeded that of the previous year. ... more than 200 persons drank tea together.” And in 1847, at the opening of the Basingstoke chapel

(Magazine:374), “the collections were liberal. The cost of the chapel will be about £150, £60 of which we expect to beg. At the opening the golden system was introduced, and upwards of £16 were promised towards the first anniversary.” In 1849 Newbury Circuit reported evangelistic meetings with good congregations, and adds: “Great credit is due to many of the collectors, who brought well-laden boxes and cards to the missionary altar. The aggregate raisings exceeded those realized last year at the same places.”

Regarding Charter Alley in 1851 a report⁶⁹ from Edward Bishop states: “Our friends had a goodly company to tea; and at the evening meeting the chapel was thronged, and the collection was cheering; while the subscription list was considerably strengthened.”

There were occasions when a wealthy person gave towards the chapel, or the ministry more generally. Thomas Baker of Reading gave generously in 1839, when Salem Chapel was purchased; the value of his gifts amounted to £500, including £90 specifically towards the purchase of the chapel⁷⁰. He died in 1841: “The loss of such a beneficent friend was the cause of great grief,” commented Thomas Russell (1886:523).

Less Persecution

Finally, Petty writes (1880:352), concerning the parts of Hampshire in the Shefford Circuit, that by the spring of 1839 the prospect had become much more cheering. The circuit report said, “Persecution is abating; villages are opening before us; the work of conversion is advancing; our members are increasing; fresh labourers are rising up; and we have built one chapel.”

⁶⁹ Magazine (1851:753)

⁷⁰ Russell (1886:461-2)

CHAPTER 5:

PERSONS, EVENTS AND ETHOS

The dissertation now traces the history of the movement in northern Hampshire, focusing first on the preachers, and then following the three routes by which they penetrated the area, from the west from Brinkworth and Shefford, the north from Reading, and the south from Micheldever. The narrative offers many examples of the features of PMism selected for critique in Chapters 6 and 7, supporting the thesis that the PMs have been frequently misrepresented or misunderstood in both scholarly and popular comment.

A: PRINCIPAL HAMPSHIRE PREACHERS

This section identifies and describes the principal itinerant preachers who took part in the expansion into Hampshire. It begins by establishing that the denomination's founders were in personal touch with the work and some of the workers, before focusing, as principal itinerants, on those named in a leaflet containing a song composed for singing "by the Newbury Carollers" in June 1882 "at the jubilee of Primitive Methodism in Hampshire"⁷¹. Both here and in later sections a recurrent motif is suffering in the cause of recapturing and promulgating primitive Methodist beliefs, methods and zeal.

PM Founders: Hugh Bourne, William Clowes

The founders of PMism played little part in the work in northern Hampshire. Nonetheless, the Hampshire mission, or persons connected with it, were in personal touch with them. John Ride was

71 Berkshire County Record Office D/MC8/9/2

converted under Clowes's preaching, and a personal friendship arose between them, for Clowes writes⁷² of his time in the Tunstall area:

God blessed my labours in the conversion of John Ride, who has now been one of our most successful missionaries in the west of England; in him I have much joy, ... In these parts we were refreshed in our labours by the hospitality of our very kind friends, Wilson, Beeston, Ride, Holgate, &c; the recollection of the kindness of these families can never pass from me.

Bourne recruited Ride as a preacher; he preached at Silchester; and in 1832 he came to the Shefford circuit following their September quarterly meeting, says Russell⁷³, after which he stayed with them for several days "and preached with good success around the neighbourhood". He preached at Shefford and in June⁷⁴ at Hurstbourne Tarrant, and met with all the preachers bar two.

Russell went to live at Bemersley, the family home of Hugh and James Bourne, at about the time of his 21st birthday, where he "had rest, and greatly delighted in the conversation and prayers of those blessed men of God ... and I was much edified and strengthened in the things of God by their advice"⁷⁵.

Antliff (1892:298-9) records some reminiscences, written by minister William Harvey of the Mitcheldever Circuit, of a visit by Hugh Bourne to his home in the winter of 1843-4. Bourne baptised Harvey's son at North Waltham chapel, and administered the Lord's Supper. "He preached eight or nine times, and the large audiences were much blessed."

The Hampshire Preachers

The biographical and obituary records seldom give much information concerning the preachers' social background, and it is not possible to confirm for Hampshire Morris's comment (1967:189) that "The ordained ministers were also of the people," or Garratt's (2002:117) that "the prevailing feature of those who entered the Primitive Methodist itinerancy was their working-class character." It has often been claimed that the leaders were from the labouring classes, which gave the labourers a close sense of identity with them. Information gathered for the current thesis suggests only that

⁷² page 117

⁷³ 1886:333

⁷⁴ Brinkworth & Swindon District Synod Official Handbook (1924:83)

⁷⁵ Russell (2005:10-11)

some were from similar labouring backgrounds, others better educated and more prosperous. Sheard (1980:515) drew a similar conclusion:

it is probably safe to say that whilst a few of the early preachers enjoyed a reasonably good education, and came from what might have been considered fairly respectable families, the majority were, broadly speaking, from the 'working classes': several came from the lowest section of labouring poor and others from quite humble farming backgrounds, though there was a sprinkling of skilled artisans and craftsmen.

Local preachers would have reflected more faithfully the societies' working-class composition.

Many of the PM preachers were young. Here are the approximate ages of some who feature in this thesis, at the time they became travelling ministers; some may err by one year, as the month of their birth and the month of their entering the ministry have not been discovered in every case, and further, there may have been a short lapse of time between their recognition as ministers and their commencing in their first stations:

John Ride	26
Thomas Russell	23
George Wallis	21
William Hazell	22
Richard Jukes	23
William Fowler	18
Elizabeth Smith	21
Jane Woolford	20
John Guy	22
George Watts	21
Edward Bishop	20
Sarah Price	22
George Eudall	35
Edmund Hancock	26
Thomas Jackson	21
William Harvey	23
George Price	27
William Peacefull	22
James Mules	24

John Ride

OLD states that John Ride

preached for the first time at a camp-meeting at nearby Mercaston in June 1816. ... The Bournes sent him into the widespread Cheshire Mission; then, in 1828, to the Brinkworth

Mission in Wiltshire (1828-1832). ... He was stationed in the Shefford Circuit, 1832-1837 and the Reading Circuit, 1837-1843.

He was born in April 1790 at Turnditch, Derbyshire. His mother died when he was very young.

He agreed with others to go and hear William Clowes preach, but he went with the intention of interrupting, not to listen to the message. Ride was the leader of the group, and took a seat in front of Clowes. But when Clowes announced his text, he felt its power. After Clowes's second visit, in January 1811, he went alone to a field, knelt in the snow, and turned his life over to Christ.

He became a local preacher, but, working on a farm, was threatened by his landlord with eviction if he continued his religious activities. He emigrated briefly to America to farm, but returned to England following the death of his wife and became an itinerant minister in 1821.

Ritson (1911:127-9) sees Ride as one of the greatest missionaries and circuit superintendents the PM Church produced, adding that to the fervour, passion and quenchless ardour of the evangelist he added the caution and breadth of aim of the ecclesiastical statesman. Tonks wrote: "To him, more than to any other single individual, is to be traced the wonderful spread of Primitive Methodism eastward, springing from the Brinkworth Circuit."

Russell (1886:333) comments: "Between Mr. Ride and his colleagues there was a deep spirit of sympathy and a very close union. Oftentimes when the conflict was heavy they would walk miles to open up troubles and talk together to God in prayer, for Mr. Ride was mighty in prayer, and many happy sessions were spent in prayer and waiting on the Lord." It is worth noting again the prominence of prayer as characterising the ethos of the movement.

John's second wife Martha⁷⁶ came to faith when she was 9, began to preach when she was 17, and married Ride when she was 19. She took part in revival services with Bourne, Petty, and with others. They left England in 1849 for Australia and settled at Benalla, where he established a small society. He retired in 1853, and died in 1862. The mortal part of him was buried in Benalla.

⁷⁶ Magazine (1875:553-4)

Thomas Russell

Russell was born on 21st December 1806 near Middlewich, Cheshire. His father died when he was three years old, but Russell's autobiography gives no details of his early life and background.

He relates that "the first clear sense I had of pardon was at a class-meeting" (though he does not tell us when that occurred). He began preaching when he was 18. In 1826 he moved to Congleton, and was encouraged to preach by the PMs there; often he walked thirty or forty miles to an appointment. Following the 1829 Conference he set off as a travelling preacher. "My mind was much drawn out in prayer as I walked along," he wrote. He began in Derbyshire, and was sent the following year to Brinkworth, as the colleague of John Ride, setting out at 5 o'clock on the morning of 29th June.

When the Berkshire mission was opened, for five months no society was formed, and Russell was appointed to it in September 1829. Few of the pioneers met with such determined opposition or witnessed such success. In his description of the Berkshire and Hampshire pioneers, Ritson (1911:129-130) suggests that Russell was scarcely second to Ride in the toils and triumphs of the early years, possessing a well-knit frame, fiery zeal and untiring devotion, and able to meet persecution of the most brutal kind with dauntless bearing and dignity.

He died in 1889.

George and Harriet Wallis

Wallis⁷⁷ was born at Wootton Bassett in 1810 and converted during a revival there in 1824 through the ministry of Samuel Heath. He soon became a local preacher, and entered the ministry in 1831. The Shefford Circuit March 1833 quarter day appointed him to open a mission in Hampshire. His stations included Brinkworth (1831), Shefford (1832), Andover (1837), Micheldever (1839-41), Basingstoke (1863-6). He retired in 1870, and died in 1894.

In 1837 he married Harriet Maslin, whose parents were members of the Wesleyan society at Ramsbury, Wiltshire. She was converted at the age of 11 when the PMs came to Ramsbury, and became a local preacher in 1834. In the Mitcheldever Circuit "she laboured with her characteristic zeal and success"⁷⁸. She constantly attended prayer meetings, in which she took a prominent part

⁷⁷ Magazine (1894:615-6)

⁷⁸ Magazine (1853:264-8)

with lively singing and fervent prayer. She died in 1852. “In her last conflict with the powers of darkness [i.e. when her death was near], God gave her such a complete and glorious deliverance, that she became perfectly resigned to his holy will; and when death approached, she beheld him without dismay.” Such comments point to the experience of assurance which Methodism brought so much into prominence.

William Fowler

Fowler was born in 1807 at Newtown, near Newbury just over the boundary in Hampshire. He was converted at Beenham under the ministry of Russell, and was sent into the ministry from the Beenham society. Kendall (II:341) describes how, at Stockbridge, a little south of the area studied here, “he and his friends were enmeshed in a rope flung round them and were being dragged towards the river. ... beaten ... and then pelted out of the place.” He died in 1834. His obituary (Magazine 1835:12-15) says, “His preaching talents were not (what some call) great, but they were eminently calculated for usefulness.”

Elizabeth Smith

The *Life and Labours of Elizabeth Russell* (begun by her, and continued by Russell, whom she married in 1833) relates that she was born in Ludlow in January 1805. Her father was a wholesale glover, but enlisted on a ship, leaving his wife with six children, of whom Elizabeth was the youngest. When she was about 8 she was apprenticed to a dressmaking business. She came to faith at about Christmas 1825, and joined the PMs, becoming one of the many links between the work in Shropshire and Hampshire.

Soon after her conversion she established a successful dressmaking business. Whilst on business at “some distant place”, she attended a PM prayer meeting and for the first time prayed publicly: “and while she was praying, the power of God came down in such streams that a stout man fell down as one shot in battle; and they had a glorious time indeed.”

In 1826 she was requested to speak for the first time at Ludlow, and having satisfied the people, was appointed to hold meetings in other places. The September 1826 quarterly meeting received a request for a preacher to be sent to Radnorshire, and Elizabeth was appointed to go. She gave up her

business. Russell writes: “Sinners being born again, was her chief motto; and this to be effected through the merits of Jesus Christ, was the substance of every sermon.” For hours together she used to spend time alone in the mountains, reading the Bible and wrestling with God in prayer for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The PM prominence of prayer should be noticed.

Russell (2005:24) remembered her going to preach in Ramsbury in April 1830: “Miss Smith, dressed with characteristic neatness, in the garb of a female Friend⁷⁹, was singing a hymn with her usual sweetness and pathos.” Magazine (1837:219) records concerning her work in Hampshire that “Frequently the travelling would be nearly one hundred miles in a week, and preaching eight or ten times, as well as leading classes,” which points to the arduous nature of these ministers’ work.

A speech, delivered by her at a missionary meeting in the Brinkworth Circuit in December 1829, was published (Magazine 1830:277-80). A few extracts offer a sense of the convictions and motivation which lay behind the evangelism:

For after all that can be said of the natural state of man, it is but a wreck of what it once was. ... Are there not men and women in England, who have the poison of the asp, the subtlety of the serpent, the ravaging of the dog, the uncleanness of the swine, the cruelty of the tiger, the fierceness of the lion, and the pride and malice of Satan. Do not imagine that this is too gloomy a description of human depravity.

Creation groans beneath the weight of human woe.

But hark! I hear a groan deeper and louder than the rest. Whence comes it? From Calvary! Yes, it is the groan of the Son of God! ... Yes it was our sins that caused the Saviour thus to suffer. ... It is his kingdom we are met to spread, the grace which brings salvation, which renews the heart, and restores man to the favour and image of God.

She died in 1836.

John and Catherine Guy

Guy was born at Freshford, Wiltshire, in 1811, attended a Wesleyan Sunday School, was converted in 1829 through the ministry of the PMs, and called to travel initially in his native circuit in 1833⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Quaker

⁸⁰ Magazine (1888:389)

He was stationed in Reading 1837-42.

He married Catherine Mary Sargeant⁸¹, who was born in Baldock in 1819. Her father died when she was a child, and she went to live with a Wesleyan uncle and aunt when she was 14 at their farm. These invited PMs John Ride and Aaron Bell into their home. Catherine was converted in 1838 through conversation with Guy. She began to exhort in public, became a local preacher in 1839, and married John on her birthday in 1840. Her “preaching was owned of the Lord in the conversion of sinners.”⁸²

On 1st July 1849 their eldest child was “seized with a fever”; Catherine “inhaled” the fever from the child and became delirious on 9th July. On 15th one of their children, aged 6, died, and four hours later, Catherine, aged 30. It should be noted that these leaders did not live charmed lives, being deeply acquainted with tragedy.

Guy died in 1887.

Edward Bishop

Bishop⁸³ was born in 1810 in Moccas, Herefordshire. He left school at the age of 9, and Sunday school at the age of 10. In about 1826 he went to hear the PM missionaries in the next parish, and “after attending a few times he became more deeply convinced of his fallen state and lost condition without Christ than he had ever been before.” He came to faith in 1826.

Within a year he felt deeply impressed that he should speak in public, and the September 1827 quarter day agreed that his name should be put on the Plan as a preacher. He entered the itinerant ministry in 1830. In 1831, and again in 1832, he was stationed in Shropshire, which makes a further link between the Salopian and Hampshire missions. He was stationed in the Shefford circuit 1833-4. The Micheldever quarterly meeting of March 1835 agreed to “request Br E Bishop from Shefford Circuit, as Superintendant for the Circuit,” and he was stationed at Micheldever 1835-8.

81 Magazine (1849:647-9)

82 Magazine (1849:647-9)

83 Magazine (1878:433)

The Magazine (1878:434) reports that:

He commenced his labours as a Primitive Methodist minister at a time when the work was intensely onerous. Long journies, poor accommodation, and ferocious persecutions were often his lot. Under such circumstances he was called upon frequently to exercise great self-denial and courage to overcome the difficulties and dangers he encountered. Especially was this the case in the agricultural districts, and notably at Mitcheldever in Hampshire, where he and the Rev. J. Ride suffered greatly, and were incarcerated in Winchester gaol thirteen days for preaching the gospel to the inhabitants of the village in the open air.

He died in 1877⁸⁴.

Sermons

No sermons preached by the Hampshire preachers in the period 1829-52 have come to light, but Magazine 1853 (pages 461-6) carried one preached at Reading by Edward Bishop on 30th January 1853, entitled *Redemption and its results*. It begins by emphasising that “the wages of sin is death,” moves on to the Lamb of God as the atoning Sacrifice for sin, calls attention to the need for penitence and belief, and identifies the results of redemption as spiritual, providential and eternal blessings for the believer, and the believer functioning as the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

84 *ibid.*:433-5

B: FROM THE WEST: Brinkworth and Shefford

Prelude: Mow Cop to Wiltshire

Garratt (2002:60) records that Shrewsbury was missioned in 1822 from the Oakengates branch of Tunstall Circuit, and became a circuit in 1824. Petty (1880:217ff) relates that in 1824 the Shrewsbury society sent Samuel Heath as missionary to an area of Wiltshire with very few Dissenters, no evangelical Anglican clergymen, and much wickedness and barbarity. In a few months Heath achieved so much that he wrote to Shrewsbury for another preacher, and obtained Edward Vaughan. The work continued to prosper, and Richard Davies was added in March, 1825. By the end of 1825 the mission had a number of powerful societies.

So notorious was the wickedness at Brinkworth that for years it had been deemed perilous for a stranger to ride through it alone, and when the PM missionaries came, they endured considerable persecution. The clergyman was bitterly opposed to their efforts. Many attended with the intention of throwing stones at them, but on hearing the preaching, they quietly dropped them, and sought divine forgiveness of their transgressions and renewal of their lives. Several became champions in the work of evangelical Christianity. A great reformation took place, and Brinkworth became the head of a circuit in 1826. Its quarterly meeting in March 1829⁸⁵ resolved to mission Berkshire.

1830 - William Hawkins, Elizabeth Smith, Thomas Russell

Already in the summer of 1830⁸⁶, perhaps as early as June⁸⁷, a local preacher from Weston (Berkshire, not Weston, Hampshire), William Hawkins, a carter converted through Russell's preaching in April 1830⁸⁸, was preaching "up in Hampshire" and reported that "we have a great work in that county." Weston is about eight miles from Combe and East Woodhay, in both of which PMism took root, and it seems likely that Hawkins was one of the first PM preachers in Hampshire, even before the itinerants penetrated the county. His employer evicted him for receiving the preachers, and (he told Russell) "Mrs Hawkins felt keenly when the bailiff put all their furniture out

⁸⁵ Petty (1880:258)

⁸⁶ Russell (2005:26, 38)

⁸⁷ Petty (1880:275-6)

⁸⁸ Petty (1880:272)

in the road, and she and her little children stood weeping under drenching rain.”

Ride reports in his Journal (Russell 2005:196) that Elizabeth Smith began her ministry on the Berkshire mission on 18th April 1830 in an area contiguous to that already opened, and that “the Lord greatly owned her labours, and many were awakened and brought to God.” (The term “awakened” describes someone who is aware of the truth of the Gospel, but has not reached the repentance and faith which constitute conversion.) In 1830⁸⁹ her “enterprising mind contemplated a field of missionary labours in Hampshire.” In the autumn she moved into Hampshire, down the valley of the Bourne, which flows into the Test below Hurstbourne Priors, and established a society at Facombe. Russell places her preaching in Hampshire between his entries dated 22nd August 1830 and January 1831. His account in the Magazine (1837:217) relates under the date 11th September 1830:

I was with her at a meeting held at Ramsbury [Wiltshire], at seven in the morning; ... And she opened Facomb, and several were converted there the first quarter, and a society formed.

There was at Hurstbourne Tarrant in Hampshire, a man who for years had been in great distress, bordering on melancholy; ... But coming, in company with others, to hear Elizabeth ... he soon found peace. This caused us to have pressing invitations to visit other places in the north of Hampshire, where a most blessed work broke out.

The decennial census gives the population of Hurstbourne Tarrant in 1831 as 786; it grew to 867 by 1851. But what does “the first quarter” mean? As the Methodist year begins in September, it is likely that Russell meant September-November 1830.

Russell composed his *Record of Events in Primitive Methodism* in 1869, but it is difficult to trace his movements with exactitude, as the dates do not always coincide with the day. The dates may denote when he wrote his Journal, and the days when the events took place: or vice versa. Thus, in 1831 “Thursday, Jan. 22nd” was either written on the Thursday, or on the 22nd; but that date in fact fell on a Saturday. On the other hand, sometimes they correlate.

Russell had already preached with good effect at Combe, which before 1895 was in Hampshire; it is now a mile inside Berkshire. Russell (1885) wrote: “I had already visited Coombe and Facombe, and formed societies.” Sadly he does not record when, but it must have been late 1830 or early 1831. Russell (1869, 2005:43) writes:

89 Magazine (1837:217)

We also opened several other places towards Silchester, and not in vain, for at Ashfordhill and neighbourhood to this day there is a blessed work. ... one day finding a bean stalk with several full pods on it lying on the road as I was passing Baughurst, I made a dinner of it.

He begins his next paragraph as “September 5th” and is still recounting the events of 1830 at that point of his narrative. It would seem therefore that initial inroads into northern Hampshire were made before the end of 1830. Finally, pointing to 1830 as the year of penetration, Russell (undated) records under 6th January 1831 that he met Ride at Combe and adds, “I had missioned this place a little while before.”

He adds (1886:208): “The people were poor, mostly labourers, whose average weekly wages was seven shillings, but they gave liberally and laboured heartily.” Understanding of the inner character of this movement can be augmented from the following narrative by Ride (Magazine 1831:266) describing a lovefeast held at Shefford on Sunday 22nd August, 1830:

...the power came down in a way I never saw before, and it ran like fire. The glory appeared visible. By some it was seen as a light, and by others as fire falling among the people, and instantly every mourner sprang up and shouted for joy. Fifteen found liberty.

This draws attention to a recurrent theme of this dissertation, that the early PMs always sought their religion in the Bible, in which they would have read (Leviticus 9:23-4): “the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord ... which when all the people saw, they shouted and fell on their faces.” Chapter 6B will discuss the ecstatic and physical experiences among the early PMs.

1831

On Tuesday 4th January 1831 Russell preached in Hampshire at Ashford Hill, where he formed a society of six members. He recorded on 6th January (which draws attention to the significance of prayer): “Met Bro. Ride at Coombe, and spoke; we had a very mighty time at prayer; and one got powerfully awakened while I was preaching.”

Russell had received invitations to visit places beyond Combe. The 1832 Magazine records under 16th January 1831 that he preached at “Faccam”, and that, later in the month, he walked eighteen miles to Facombe, preached, and joined three together as a society. He adds, “I had some powerful

meetings at Coam, and Faccam, during the week.” Under the date Saturday 7th February⁹⁰ he wrote that he preached at Faccombe and “had a powerful time”. On “Friday, 16th, 1831”⁹¹ he reports, somewhat confusingly (for only September and December had Friday 16th in 1831), “Preached at Faccombe for the first time of our missioning here.”

From the base in Brinkworth⁹², Russell was formally appointed to work Hampshire in April 1831. Now, “with supplications to the Lord for his help and blessing,” he set out and recorded in *Primitive Methodism in Berkshire* (1885:13) that:

on Sunday, April 10, I walked ten miles to Ashfordhill, in Hampshire, and preached twice, ... Thus, with mingled feelings, I started for “labours more abundant”, beyond the Hampshire Hills; and on Sunday, April 17th, 1831, I began at Hurstbourne Tarrant, and went on to mission new places, often preaching six times on the Sabbath besides every day in the week.

April found him at Hurstbourne Tarrant, Littledown, Linkenholt, Vernham Dean, Woodhay, Burghclere and Ashmansworth. On Sunday, 1st May, he was at Ashmansworth, and preached at eight o’clock “to a good number”. At 10.30 he heard John Ride preach at Faccombe, then went on to Hurstbourne Tarrant and Upton. That Sunday Ride preached⁹³ at a number of places, finishing an arduous day’s labour at 10 o’clock at Linkenholt. Some members of the Osmond family heard him, listening from their garden. The long-term contribution to PMism made by the Osmond family resonates strongly with an observation of Sheard (1980:148-9): “The early progress of Primitive Methodism in the Chester branch and circuit provides an excellent example of the importance to the movement of the accession of even one or two influential farmers.” The 1841 census lists three Osmond farmers in Linkenholt, Richard (65), Richard (35) and Michael (35), ages being approximate in that census. Richard senior’s household included a son Stephen (20), who later became a PM minister, and three servants aged 15-20. On the 1851 census Richard junior and Michael were Linkenholt farmers employing forty people, and farming 1050 acres. Each had two resident servants, one as ‘assistant’. When Russell missioned Linkenholt (*Autobiography*:66-7) Michael became the first member. Richard became a local preacher. An unnamed sister became “a very useful minister with us.”

90 7th February 1831 was a Monday.

91 in fact a Wednesday

92 Petty (1880:278-281)

93 Russell (1886:271)

Kathleen Innes⁹⁴ reports that Upton was a centre of both farming and malting, renowned for its strong ale, and dominated by seven men known as “village champions”, one of whom was notorious as a thief, another for his bad language. These were at a tree in the village centre one Sunday afternoon (it is not stated in exactly which year, but it may be assumed that it was 1831) when five soberly-dressed strangers approached, singing a hymn. Their leader was “a minister named Russell”, who prayed, and then began to preach. Following the preaching, as they were leaving, they were booed and pelted, but they returned night after night, and were joined by a female preacher called Godden. One of the “champions” was Thomas Cummin, born in Upton in 1810 and converted in 1832. He became a local preacher, and in 1834 joined the itinerancy in the Shefford Circuit.

Also in May Russell (2005:56) writes that he had for some weeks had invitations to preach in a number of places in Hampshire, and made his way to “Bindley” (Binley), “where Miss Farr got awakened and converted. Her parents too joined the society, and afterwards scores were converted in their house.” He adds (page 208), “And that has been a home for the preachers ever since.”

Russell reported in the 1837 Magazine that Elizabeth Smith was taken ill towards the end of January, 1831, and rested for eleven weeks. He writes: “My labours had been extensive, and I mostly walked about one hundred miles and visited as many families in the week, besides preaching twelve or thirteen times, forming societies, holding prayer meetings, &c.” The arduous nature of the work is notable. He applied to the June 1831 quarter day for another preacher, and the meeting appointed Smith as his helper. She composed a long hymn which she presented to Russell on her arrival in Hampshire (Russell (2005:205-6)). It contains the lines, emphasising the importance to them of prayer and of the intervention of God:

*For Hampshire we as suppliants bow,
Our humble cries besiege thy throne;
Thy Spirit pour, O, pour it now,
Answer our anguished earnest groan.*

The novelty of female preaching attracted crowds, and her manner and oratory made deep impressions on her hearers. She received pressing invitations to visit places towards Winchester, Whitchurch, and Basingstoke, but more missionaries would have been needed in order to accept them.

94 *Bourne Valley Anthology* (undated, Andover, UK: Innes)

Unravelling of all this, with the background of work established by Hawkins and others by the summer of 1830, this timetable is suggested:

<i>Thomas Russell</i>	<i>Elizabeth Smith</i>
Sept 1829 appointed to Berks	
	April 1830 appointed to Berks
Autumn 1830 strays into Hants	Autumn 1830 strays into Hants
April 1831 appointed to Hants	
	Midsummer 1831 appointed to Hants

Russell (1869) records that throughout 1831 the work was concentrated in the villages in and around the Bourne valley, including (within the scope of this study) Combe, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Faccombe, Linkenholt, Ashmansworth, St Mary Bourne, East Woodhay, Highclere, Burghclere, Binley.

Shefford Circuit

By December 1831 the Berkshire mission had acquired such strength that the quarterly meeting decided to make it independent, and it was separated from Brinkworth in January 1832 and made into the Shefford Circuit (renamed Newbury in 1846), responsible for the Hampshire Mission. They were self-supporting, having met all expenses, and now became self-governing. This new circuit contained 596 members, and two chapels had already been erected in Berkshire. Seven travelling preachers were appointed, and during the ensuing quarter an increase of 110 members was achieved.

Not many Circuit preaching plans have survived, but 1834-5 finds the Shefford Circuit divided thus, this list showing only places within the geography of this study:

Home BranchAndover Branch⁹⁵Micheldever

Newbury

Andover

Rotherwick⁹⁶

Kingsclere

Stokebourne

Silchester

Ecchinswell

Up Hurstbourne⁹⁷Mortimer West End⁹⁸

Burghclere

Dunley

Baughurst

Binley

East Sherborne

Bourne

West Sherborne

Ashmansworth

Tadley

Faccomb

Combe

The Circuit Plan for 1850-1 includes, in Hampshire:

Ashfordhill	10.30, 2.00; midweek
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Gore End	2.00, 6.00; midweek
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Kingsclere	10.00, 2.00; midweek
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Plastow Green ⁹⁹	2.00, 6.00; midweek
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East Woodhay	2.00, 5.00; midweek
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Ecchinswell	5.00
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Russell (1886:396) quotes Ride's Journal that Ride was in "Ecclimswell" (clearly a misprint for Ecchinswell) on Sunday 19th October 1834, "and while a lovefeast was in progress, 'four fell to the floor and began to cry for mercy.'" The work progressed, and the society grew from nine to twenty. By March 1841 the Circuit claimed 742 members and 439 children.¹⁰⁰

95 names given as on the Plan

96 Plus the places listed in 5D on Micheldever

97 Hurstbourne Tarrant

98 This parish was transferred from Berkshire to Hampshire in 1879.

99 spelled *Plaster Green*

100 Magazine (1841:390), *The State of the Brinkworth District*

Newbury and Kingsclere

An 1845 PM chapel in Kingsclere, attracting 50 people in the morning and 75 in the afternoon, is recorded in the 1851 census. The 1849 Magazine reports evangelistic services in Kingsclere and other places. Except when the weather was unfavourable, meetings were well attended. The circuit was improving, congregations were generally good, and several societies had “lately been visited with refreshings from the presence of the Lord,” resulting in many conversions.

The Magazine (1852:303) reported concerning Newbury that “the Spirit of the Lord has been graciously poured out, many sinners have already been converted, backsliders reclaimed, and believers built up in their most holy faith” in all the principal places in the circuit. Watts (1995:688-9) estimates that at the time of the religious census 7.2% of Kingsclere’s 8909 inhabitants attended PM worship. (The figures cited here and below refer to surrounding areas, not only to Kingsclere, Andover and Whitchurch.) It is plain that the incipient transition chronicled in Chapter 4B had not brought the impetus of the movement to a standstill.

Andover

Andover was missioned from the Shefford Circuit in 1833. This mission constituted the opening of a new area, and encountered a mixed reception: the evangelists and their associates were subjected in some places to physical attack, but in others were well received, established societies, and registered buildings for worship.

Petty (1880:331-8) may be followed initially. George Wallis was appointed to begin missionary operations in Andover and its vicinity in the spring of 1833. He first visited Andover on the morning of Sunday 5th May accompanied by friends from Hurstbourne Tarrant, Littledown and Linkenholt. They conducted a service in the Walled Meadow, and a great number of people came together, some to listen, some to disturb. Several were drinking and swearing, but Wallis preached with freedom amid the uproar, and announced his intention to return the following Sunday.

Next time he met with more determined opposition. A gang forced their way among the congregation and knocked him down. Eggs and dirt were thrown at him; the mob rushed at him crying, “Kill him, kill him,” but he escaped.

The following Sunday morning he returned, met William Wiltshire and members from societies in surrounding villages, and with them began to sing in the market place to attract listeners. People threw rotten eggs, shouted, and pushed violently. The beadle intervened, seized Wallis by his collar, and escorted him down the street followed by the roaring mob amidst cries of “Away with them!” and “Throw them into the river!” As they were being dragged away by the beadle and constable, the mob struck them with besoms and sticks and tore their coats. When Wallis found shelter in a house, the mob turned on his supporters from the villages and drove them out of town, beating both men and women and tearing their clothes.

Ride’s Journal for 27th November 1836 (Magazine 1837:263-6) relates: “Walked to Andover, and preached at half-past ten to a good congregation. A blessed influence rested on the meeting. ... Returned to Andover, and spoke at 6 p.m., to a crowded congregation.” The persecution in Andover abated after a second room was rented “of a respectable person, who used his influence, which, in great degree, quelled the persecution.” In 1838 the Society¹⁰¹ purchased land on which were old buildings, for the erection of a preacher’s house and chapel, which was opened in October, and “a blessed unction was felt.” Watts (1995:688-9) estimates that at the time of the religious census 7.2% of Andover’s 17,266 inhabitants attended PM worship. Thus, despite the opposition they had faced, the mission flourished. It is worth noting the bravery and determination not only of the preachers, but of the helpers from the surrounding villages.

Whitchurch, Overton, Longparish

Over the ensuing weeks the mission extended to several places including Whitchurch, Overton and Longparish. William Fowler¹⁰² was appointed by the 1833 September Quarter Day meeting to work with Wallis in the Andover Mission. He preached in many places, including Whitchurch, during the final five months of his brief life.

Longparish¹⁰³, seen as a place where drunkenness and vice prevailed, offered violent opposition. Wallis first preached there on the 8th of May, 1833; a large congregation assembled, some of whom listened with attention, but others made a disturbance. He preached there again on the 17th, when he was pelted with rotten eggs, and the people endured serious disturbance. Church (1851:107-8)

101 Magazine (1839:73)

102 Magazine (1835:13)

103 Petty (1880:337)

quotes from Wallis's journal, sent to the Magazine by Ride: "24 May, 1833. Went to Longparish, and attempted to preach, but could not for the persecution. The rebels overturned the fence of a man's garden, and broke to pieces the stool I stood on."

Edward Bishop's Journal records a camp meeting at Longparish on 21st May 1837 at which "The preachers were powerfully helped from heaven and hundreds listened with marked attention." In 1841 the circuit committee resolved "That Long Parish be left without preaching till spring," and in May 1842 "That Whitchurch be take up in lew of Long Parish." The work was still fluid.

Whitchurch lies about nine miles south-west of Basingstoke. At first the preachers encountered no opposition (Petty 1880:335). Wallis preached there on 29th May 1833. A large number of people attended, many of whom received him with great kindness. Nonetheless, considerable persecution soon arose and the services were seriously disrupted. William Fowler walked seventeen miles on 25th September in order to preach in the market place. Despite "a volley of abuse" from one person, he preached with great freedom, and afterwards held a prayer meeting in a house. On 9th October he preached there and enjoyed a very peaceable time. He was there again on 16th October. A society was soon established.

Edward Bishop's Journal (Magazine 1837:393-4) relates that on 24th April 1837 "we" preached in a cottage in Whitchurch. The cottage was occupied by a widow in straitened circumstances. An unidentified enemy of the work passed on slanderous representations, which persuaded a "benevolent lady", who had been showing kindness to the widow, to tell her that she must either stop the meetings or "forfeit her favours". Bishop comments that "the poor widow had not faith sufficient to lose her life for Christ's sake, so we go again into the street." Here is noted the effect when premises were denied them. Nonetheless, they became established and a chapel was built in 1849¹⁰⁴.

Whitchurch was made into a branch in its own right, and was transferred to the Mitcheldever Circuit. Minister Edmund Hancock reported¹⁰⁵ in March 1851 that, in the Whitchurch Branch, the Lord had been pouring out his Spirit upon them for several weeks past, to the conversion of "many vile sinners". Extra services had been held. Local members and "our praying host" cooperated heartily in the work, "and the revival flame is still burning." More than thirty people had professed

104 1851 religious census, entry 707

105 Magazine (1851:306 (May))

faith at Barton Stacey, Canada¹⁰⁶, Hurstbourne Priors and Whitchurch. It can be seen that the impetus of the movement had not reached a standstill before the close of the period of this study. At the 1851 census, in the chapel, the morning saw 80 + 14 children, the afternoon 130 + 14 children, and the evening 190. The minister was Hancock, of Chapel House, Whitchurch. Watts (1995:688-9) estimates that at the time of the religious census 11.3% of Whitchurch's 5619 inhabitants attended PM worship.

At Overton¹⁰⁷, the preacher and his friends had been threatened so seriously on one Sunday that the next Sunday he was accompanied by only one friend, "not knowing what might be permitted to befall him". He met a great number of people in the street, many of them already excited by alcohol, and whilst he prayed, sang and preached they hurled addled eggs at him and his friend, until it became difficult to endure the stench. When the supply of eggs ran out, they used flints from the road. A thousand or more men, women and children stood by and watched.

Binley

Travelling preacher William Wiltshire records in the Magazine (1834:111) that the Mitcheldever Branch of the Shefford Circuit held a camp meeting at Binley on 26th May, which attracted a large congregation. Life and power were felt in the preaching, and many were converted. Russell (1886:458) quotes Ride's Journal for Saturday, 26th November, 1836: "Walked from Shefford to Binley, a distance of eighteen miles, through a heavy rain." Russell adds:

Marvellous were the displays of God's saving grace in Mr. Farr's kitchen at Binley; people were known to come ten, twelve, and fifteen miles to be prayed with, and it is estimated that nearly two hundred were converted in this humble dwelling, many of whom became distinguished for their zeal and piety. This old kitchen was truly a Bethel, and around it cluster memories of revivals which followed for many years in this part of Hampshire.

Once more, the availability of a venue played a significant rôle in the work. Kendall¹⁰⁸ adds: "Miss Farr, who had strong mental powers and had received a superior education, became a local preacher, and in 1837 married George Price." The Whitchurch registration district lists an 1837 marriage between Jane Farr and George Price, thus supplying the bride's forename. Price fasted once a week

106 a village in the New Forest

107 Petty (1880:335-6)

108 Vol. II:340

and held prayer meetings as early as 4 a.m. for labourers and others who went to work early: practices which again show the prominence of prayer in the early ethos.

Ashford Hill

Notes compiled by Berkshire County Record Office state that there were PM meetings probably by 1835, held in private houses. A chapel was built in 1838, and extended in about 1850. The 1851 religious census records 72 people attending in the morning, and 86 in the afternoon.

Andover Circuit

In March, 1837, according to the Magazine (pages 311-3), such stability and strength had been attained that the Andover mission was made into a separate circuit, containing 340 members, and four travelling preachers. Over the course of the following year the prejudices of many of the inhabitants abated, the societies grew in maturity, and realised a net increase of thirty members. In 1840 the membership rose to 410.

A downturn came by the mid-1840s and serious persecution resumed. According to the PM 'Aldersgate' Magazine (1900:700-1), a minister called Samuel Turner was stationed in Andover 1844-5. He recalled: "When I entered this circuit it was in a seriously depressed state. Its income was so limited that it was not able to pay the married preachers fourteen shillings a week. ... The town chapel was overburdened with debt, and the society was small, and the congregation scanty. ... and the village congregations generally small." During Turner's two-year ministry in Andover, matters changed markedly for the better, and the article notes a revival of religion during that period in parts of the circuit. Although in most neighbouring towns the violence of opposition had spent itself, this was not the case in Andover. Turner, who always took to the open air when the weather was favourable, had to face the most persistently violent opposition of his career. Hundreds would gather round the small, committed band assembled in the market-place for worship, and disturb the proceedings by noise and the throwing of eggs. At some of the Sunday services it was reckoned that little short of two hundred eggs were thrown. In those days there were no policemen to preserve the peace. That was theoretically the duty of the beadle, who openly encouraged the violence in Andover. Some of the most courageous and persistent in upholding the ministers in the work were a

band of faithful women, including Turner's wife. Nonetheless, Turner was able to record conversions throughout the circuit.

An 1849 Circuit Plan lists 37 places, spread over a wide geographical area. It announces several camp meetings, salvation meetings, tea meetings and a missionary meeting. At Andover the 1851 census recorded 78 + 50 in the morning, 50 + 45 in the afternoon, and 120 + 30 in the evening.

The census also records an 1838 PM chapel at East Woodhay, which drew 20 people in the morning, 60 in the afternoon, and 80 in the evening. Services for the Hurstbourne Tarrant area were held at cottages in Ibthorpe. Here are some figures of full society members, extracted from the Circuit account book:

	June, 1837	Sept	Dec	March, 1838	March, 1850	Dec, 1852
Andover	14	15	17	17	47	42
Hurstbourne Tarrant	26	26	24	24	31	18
Stoke	14	14	15	17	9	13
[St Mary] Bourne	20	20	20	20	30	57
Binley	8	10	10 ¹⁰⁹	17 ¹¹⁰		
Faccomb	10	10	12	10	23	18
Ashmansworth	12	12	12	11	33	24
Upton	16	16	16	13	29	22
Combe ¹¹¹					27	24

Magazine (1846:32) reports the purchase of a large carpenter's shop and three cottages at Ashmansworth for £80. The shop had been partly fitted up for worship and was opened formally on

109 with Dunley

110 with Dunley

111 Combe came on the Plan in 1837 according to the Andover quarterly minutes.

2nd November 1845 by Miss Steel, Mr [presumably William] Merritt, and Samuel Turner. Chapels were built in the Circuit as follows:

Andover	1838
St Mary Bourne (Swampton)	1838
Ashmansworth	1845
Facombe	1847

The following circuits were formed from the Andover Circuit: Romsey (1843), Lymington (1843), Lyndhurst (1844), Southampton (1848), Christchurch (1848), but their history lies outside the scope of this thesis.

St Mary Bourne

St Mary Bourne was missioned in 1833¹¹². Violent opposition was encountered: showers of rotten eggs were thrown, plus stones and dirt; guns were fired, tin kettles were beaten, to drown the voices of the preachers. William Fowler preached there in September 1833 “with great liberty, although in a storm of rotten eggs and stones.”¹¹³ In 1838 two tenements and a garden were purchased, and a chapel erected on the plot was opened: it is shown in the photograph in the Appendix. The debt on the chapel and cottages was £125¹¹⁴. The 1851 census recorded the following: morning 49 scholars; afternoon 160 + 47 children; evening 185.

Silchester and nearby villages

This area includes the following place names: Mortimer, Stratfield Mortimer, Mortimer Common, Mortimer West End. The county boundary runs through them. Some of the meetings in places containing the name “Mortimer” may therefore have taken place just inside Berkshire.

112 Magazine (1839:373)

113 Church (1851:113)

114 Magazine 1839:373

Russell recorded (2005:43) ministry as early as 1830 in places towards Silchester, and at Ashfordhill and neighbourhood. It was in 1834¹¹⁵ that the first PM house meetings were held in Silchester. The following year a structure of tree branches covered with furze from the common was built. Edward Millichamp (1898:7) records that “The first chapel at Silchester was built of poles, from the forest and furze gathered off the common.” When it began to decay, the new chapel was built in 1839. (Millichamp was stationed in Reading 1892-3 and Silchester 1901-2.) Thompson (1939:86) may give an impression of this chapel, in her reference to a “furze and daub building” whose “walls were of furze branches closely pressed together and daubed with a mixture of mud and mortar”. She observes that people “built their cottages of these materials with their own hands”.

In June 1835 the Mitcheldever Circuit quarterly meeting decided that Silchester, Mortimer, Tadley and ‘Soak’ [Aldermaston Soke] should be transferred to the home part of the Shefford Circuit; that Micheldever be made into a circuit; and that Hannington and Kingsclere be transferred to Micheldever. The 1835 Shefford Circuit Plan included Silchester and Mortimer on Sundays, at 1.30 and 6.00 pm respectively, plus Soak on Thursdays and Mortimer on Fridays.

115 Ayres, M., & Sanders, K. J. (1988)

C: FROM THE NORTH: Reading

At the March 1835 quarter day¹¹⁶ the Shefford Circuit made arrangements for opening a new mission at Reading. Preachers Ride, Jackson and Cummin were appointed to it. Ride first preached there on 12th April 1835 to a large audience at 9:30 in the morning. At 2 pm Edward Bishop preached to a larger congregation; in the evening Ride's wife preached to an even larger assembly. Millichamp, writing in the *Christian Messenger* (1902:37-8) about five Ford brothers from Silchester, and others called Tull, "with many more," says: "On the morning of the day Reading was missioned these brave men held a prayer meeting at 4 o'clock in a cottage. ... From this point they proceeded on their way to town, ... The meetings here began at 9 o'clock." The distance was nine miles, a 3- to 4-hour walk. Ayres and Sanders (1988) report Silchester local preachers taking part at Ride's first service in Reading, and at open-air services in Reading. On the Mitcheldever Circuit July-October Circuit Plan, three preachers are listed for "Reading Mission": S. Chamberling, M. Tull, C. Ford. The last is presumably a Charles Ford who comes into the narrative later in this chapter.

A week after Ride's first service at Reading, Thomas Jackson's Journal¹¹⁷ reports that Jackson arrived in Reading "very much weary and foot-sore" on Sunday morning 19th April, 1835. The following Sunday he attended the 5 a.m. prayer meeting at 'Soak' where the house was so crowded that there was insufficient room for the people to kneel. Many offered short, lively prayers, showing again the emphasis on prayer. On 14th May he preached there to a large, attentive congregation. On 24th April 1835 he was at Silchester in the afternoon, where he led the class and received the names of five who wished to become members. In the evening he preached at Mortimer to a numerous congregation. That night he held a prayer meeting at Mortimer West End, and "the Lord was present among us." On 3rd May an estimated 300 people gathered to hear him preach, after which he held a prayer meeting, where many were blessed.

Jackson¹¹⁸ and Ride reported opposition in Mortimer and elsewhere in the circuit, but not the brutality encountered elsewhere in Hampshire, and in September Ride surmised that the reason was that "the magistrates have been more favourable to us."

116 Magazine (1836:378), extracts from John Ride's Journal

117 Magazine (1836:459-462)

118 Magazine (1836:461)

Ride's Journal for 7th May records that he preached at Soak to a crowded assembly. On 8th May 1835¹¹⁹, he "heard Bro. Woodward preach in the barn at Mortimer, to a very large congregation. I also spoke." On 17th May Ride and others held a camp meeting at Mortimer and believed they felt the power of God. It was this that they always sought, not the power of their own abilities. Later in the day a great number bent on persecution attended, and caused much interruption in the prayer services, but a lovefeast was held at which about five "professed to find the Lord".

On 6th June, Jackson preached in the barn at Mortimer at night. On 17th September the house was full for preaching at Silchester. Silchester, West End and Soak, which are about a mile apart, had been alternately holding a 5 o'clock prayer meeting on Sunday mornings for about a year. On Sunday 15th November 1835¹²⁰ they held a lovefeast in the barn at Mortimer. "The mighty power of the Lord came down. Several cast themselves upon the atonement, and received redemption by faith in Christ." Conversion was always the goal of the evangelism.

On Thursday 19th November 1835 Ride visited and preached at Silchester (Magazine 1836:382). "The house being so excessively crowded, it was with difficulty I spoke to the people." On Christmas Day he administered the Lord's Supper to about a hundred communicants at Mortimer West End. He preached in the afternoon at Mortimer, and "the power of God was mightily present, and faith rose to a great height. ... I think ten or twelve were enabled to rejoice in God as a sin-pardoning Saviour."

The year produced such progress that by the June 1835 quarter day they had 33 members; 100 in September; 150 in December. On Christmas Eve 1835 a watchnight service was held at 'Soak' at which "ten were enabled to believe in the great Atonement, and obtained pardon."

By the March 1836 quarter day they claimed 300 members. Ride's Journal for 29th and 30th November 1836 records: "I walked to Reading, a journey of 29 miles. This branch is doing well, the work is quite on a move. Preached. The grace of God was poured into the hearts of believers; and at the close we had a blessed prayer meeting." The poverty and energy of the travelling preachers are notable; John Ride did not travel by horse.

In 1837¹²¹ the Reading branch was made into a Circuit with 450 members and four travelling preachers. Kendall (Vol. II:340) relates that Ride moved to Reading in 1838. The Circuit report for

119 Magazine (1836:381)

120 John Ride's Journal quoted in 1836 Magazine

121 Magazine (1837:311-3)

that year¹²² says that despite determined opposition, the Circuit was in a prosperous condition. In the 1841 Magazine the Circuit reported threats of members losing their employment and being evicted from their homes, and their children being expelled from charity schools.

In March 1839 the Circuit quarterly meeting appointed Ride and Isaac Nullis (father of Isaac Septimus Nullis) to gather money to buy a house and garden at Silchester, and to build a chapel. The chapel was opened on Sunday 27th October 1839, with George Wallis and John Coxhead as preachers¹²³. Hugh Bourne preached at Silchester on 13th May 1840.¹²⁴ Such contact of PMism's Founders with the work or workers in Hampshire helped keep the ministry consonant with, and a genuine part of, the movement in the rest of the country.

Baughurst¹²⁵ contained a scattered population mainly of farmworkers, woodmen, woodworkers, and people making birch besoms. Over the winter of 1834-5 there was a PM meeting each Thursday; its speakers included George Wallis. There were no Sunday services. By July 1840 there was a weekly Sunday morning service at 9 o'clock. Services were held in a house in 1840, and by the autumn of 1841 there were regular meetings in the home of James West, registered as a "meeting-place for Protestant Dissenters" in November 1841. From May 1842 there were Sunday services at 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., and a Thursday evening meeting. On Sunday afternoons the preacher preached at Stoney Heath, about two miles south. A small wooden chapel was opened in Baughurst in 1845 next to the blacksmith's shop¹²⁶. By 1849 Baughurst was holding its services at 2 p.m. and 6 p.m.. At the time of the 1851 census it was drawing an average of 150 in the morning; 160 came in the afternoon, and 145 in the evening. The census records a second PM meeting at Townsend, Baughurst, in a house not used exclusively for worship. It held a morning service which drew forty people.

At Tadley the PMs were still meeting in a house; the Census recorded 70 in attendance in the morning, and 91 in the evening.

In January 1841¹²⁷ the PMs of Reading were holding a prayer meeting every morning at 5 o'clock, and were meeting every evening. An encouraging number professed faith. On 24th January the chapel was so crowded that no more people could gain entry, so an overflow meeting for about 300

122 Magazine (1838:424)

123 Reading Quarterly Minutes, March 1839.

124 Magazine 1840

125 *Baughurst Methodist Church 1872-1972*

126 *Memories of Baughurst*:47

127 Magazine (1841:267)

was held in the school room. By March of that year the Circuit claimed 1029 members, and 322 children.¹²⁸

The 1846 Plan for the Circuit lists 43 places, many of them outside the parameters of this work. They include Silchester, Mortimer West End, Baughurst, Tadley, and Charter Alley (called Chalther Alley). The December 1850 Minutes record a resolution regarding preaching at Wolverton Common, where a chapel was built in 1867.

On the day of the 1851 census Silchester chapel attracted 123 + 40 children in the afternoon, and 174 in the evening. The minister was Lancelot Dobinson of Reading. Charter Alley (recorded as Chutter Alley) was still a house meeting, yet the afternoon drew 92 people, and the evening 137.

Magazine (1852:180) writes about the new chapel at Charter Alley. They had preached the gospel, mainly in the open air, for nearly twenty years to the scattered population of the agricultural neighbourhood. For years they experienced toil and discouragement, but “the seed then sown in faith has since sprung up, and is now yielding a cheering harvest.” In 1848 the Circuit quarterly meeting decided to pay £35 for the purchase of a small cottage, which was fitted up for worship, but it was soon much too small to contain the people who flocked to hear. So the trustees bought an old cottage and built the chapel on part of the garden. (The other cottage reverted to a dwelling.) The chapel opened on 21st December 1851.

Trouble at Silchester

This subsection chronicles events of a different character from much of the published primary literature. They begin with the Circuit’s Quarterly Minute Book for 19th June 1848. The of names Charles and Henry Ford were to be sent to the denomination’s General Committee. Charles was living at Silchester and was a local preacher and class leader. In fact the name C. Ford appears in the Reading Branch of the Shefford Circuit Plan as a local preacher in the October 1836 Plan, and in the Mitcheldever Circuit Plan in 1835, as coming from the Reading Mission. If these names refer to the same preacher, he was of long standing.

Charles Ford’s name was to be sent to the Committee because he had been neglecting to hold class meetings and to collect class monies; also, he “supported the illegal Anniversary Camp Meeting at

128 Magazine (1841:390)

Baughurst and appoints and holds Camp Meetings where, and when he pleases.” (The word *illegal* probably refers, not to English law, but to local circuit decisions. The Minute Book observes more than once that the Baughurst chapel was private property, not belonging to the denomination.) Not dissimilarly, Henry Ford, a local preacher living at Silchester, had been “refuseing to meet in Class” and had supported “the above illegal Meetings.”

The following year, 1849, the September minutes resolved that “the Local Preachers of the Silchester Society be kindly requested to meet in Class as often as their circumstances will admit.” Moses Tull and Charles Ford were to be appointed Leaders of the society, with Henry Ford and James Green as assistant leaders. (Millichamp records that the first preaching house at Silchester was the Tull family’s home.) It seems that a rapprochement was in the air. In addition, Edward Bishop was empowered “to take what steps he shall deem prudent” to induce the society to meet in class.

Sadly matters did not improve to the Circuit’s satisfaction. The December 1850 Minutes resolved “that the matter of the non attendance of the Silchester members be differed until next Quarter Day, and that the official characters, who do not attend, shall be desired to attend the next Quarterly Meeting to state their objections.”

The 1851 population census lists two men called Charles Ford living in Silchester, each being a blacksmith. One is aged 28, was born in Silchester, and is living at the Smith’s Shop, and too young to be the 1835 local preacher. His wife is Elizabeth; they have three children. The other is aged 69, and his wife is Levinia. Their address is Common, Silchester. It is not obvious which is the local preacher mentioned in these minutes.

The March 1851 Minutes record “that, while the reasons assigned by the brethren at Silchester, and its neighbourhood, for their non meeting in Class are not perfectly satisfactory to this meeting, they, nevertheless, are such as to require its calm consideration and patient forbearance; and, also, the continued use of prudent means to induce them to meet as far as their circumstances will permit. That, as the most effectual means in our power to employ to assist them to meet in Class, one of our Preachers shall reside at Silchester, and devote one day and evening in each week to visit and meet the Society in that place.” This was James Mules.

However, thereafter relationships deteriorated. The June Quarterly Meeting desired “a special committee to investigate a report affecting the moral character of Bro Charles Ford.” Six men were

chosen for the committee, and Ford was allowed “to nominate any other Christian men.” This suggests that there was an attempt to secure fairness, as noticed elsewhere in this thesis.

The September 1851 quarterly meeting resolved:

That It having been proved on the evidence of Mrs Ruth Ford to the special Committee appointed by the last quarterly meeting to investigate the case, that Brother Charles Ford has had many interviews with Mrs Elizabeth Elliott at the house of Brother William Ford in circumstances of great indiscretion, that Committee required Brother Charles Ford to remove Mrs Elliott from his own house where she now resides - as in the opinion of that Committee this measure would aid in removing the imputation of serious criminality now laid against his christian character, and also in relieving his family circle from the grief they suffer through the part of Mrs Elliott's residing in the same house with him. This requirement of the special Committee shall be enforced and Brother Charles Ford shall be suspended from taking any appointments until he complies with the said requirement.

The December 1851 quarterly meeting records Charles Ford's resignation, without specifying what he resigned from: membership, or his place on the Plan. The March 1852 Circuit Report, in reply to the question “What persons, who were official characters, have left during the year, and for what causes?” relates: “Charles Ford, Local Preacher, for repeated interviews with a married woman in circumstances of great indiscretion; and for refusing to put the same woman away from his house, where she now lives separated from her husband.”

The authorities increased their efforts. At the March 1852 quarterly meeting, Edward Bishop was deputed “to call on Charles Ford and obtain the Chapel Steward's book of Silchester from him.” The March 1852 Circuit Report adds: “We are in the crisis of the application of discipline at Silchester, and cannot speak to the results at present. The application of discipline, at Silchester, has already removed eight Local Preachers, and one Prayer Leader, from our Plan.”

The Circuit requested that Edward Bishop should remain for an additional year in the Circuit, because “we believe that the case and circumstances of Silchester alone, will be sufficient to convince you of the propriety of his re-station to this circuit.” The request continues concerning Mules that “we believe that his re-station will render important aid in the critical crisis through which we are now passing.” He stayed till 1853.

A letter was sent on behalf of the April 1852 quarterly meeting to the General Committee saying that “Mr Charles Ford was the Steward for the Trustees of Silchester Chapel, and has hitherto refused to give up the account book.”

There seems to be a hidden other side to all this. Speculation is prompted about Mrs Elliott, for the same September 1851 meeting records the resolution: “That Bro [T.?] Hunt be requested not to allow Mrs Elizabeth Elliott to accompany him to or from his appointments alone.” Secondly, the 1851 population census shows no-one called Elizabeth Elliott living in Silchester; the nearest is some six miles away in Kingsclere.

Furthermore, people sided with Charles Ford. The March 1852 Annual Report records that seven local preachers, including a David Ford, plus a prayer leader, were no longer members on the grounds that they “sympathizing with Charles Ford have such in their places and their resignations have been accepted.” Likewise, the quarterly Minutes, 15th March 1852, state that “Brothers Bartlett and Claridge come off the plan, as Bro Bartlett has resigned and Bro Claridge having joined Charles Ford’s party, and his name on their plan. That Bro William Stacey’s name come off the plan, having joined Charles Ford’s party.”

The letter sent on behalf of the April 1852 quarterly meeting to the General Committee explained that “Mr Charles Ford was an influential local preacher,” and it has been noted that he may have been a preacher since 1835, making seventeen years of service.

The following year’s Annual Report, covering the twelve months up to March 1853, records the loss of one exhorter and one prayer leader, “for uniting with Mr Charles Ford and his friends.” The Report continues:

in several of the country places we are suffering financially through the prejudices which Mr Charles Ford and his friends have awakened and are now assiduously promoting, against every thing constitutional and connexional; and especially against our class meetings and our Itinerant Ministry. As they have now organized themselves, their opposition, for the present, has an injurious effect upon several of our Societies; and some of our sincere, although weak-minded, members, have been drawn aside by them. They are doing all they can to embarrass our chapel interest at Silchester; and, as far as they can, to spread the same influence in other places, especially those contiguous to Silchester.

The 1854 Report looks back over the previous three years. It records another local preacher having been lost “for uniting with *Mr Charles Ford* and others.” It continues with a list of members “removed from the society during the last year through the destructive influence of Mr Charles Ford and his friends”. The list adds up to 41 members from Silchester, Burghfield, Baughurst, Charter Alley, East Sherborne, and Ufton, and is followed by the observation that “these are not one-third of the number of members removed from our Roll Book during the last three years, through the operation of the same poisonous leaven.”

Reading between the lines, the following details emerge:

- another local preacher requested not to travel to his appointments alone with Mrs Elliott
- at least 124 members willing to be severed from PMism
- these from half a dozen societies
- eight or more local preachers expelled or resigning
- an exhorter and a prayer leader prepared to forfeit their positions.

Furthermore, the Circuit’s style cannot be deemed unbiased. Were those who supported Charles Ford really weak-minded? Were they really a poisonous leaven? It may never be known, but it demonstrates that the PM revival was not without its troubles, failings and sins, all of which contributes to balancing the hagiography concerning the early movement, as will be discussed in Chapter 7A.

D: FROM THE SOUTH: Micheldever

Wesleyans

Although the general Wesleyan background was outlined in Chapter 3B, it will be helpful to focus briefly on the earlier Wesleyan work in Micheldever. Vickers (1987:240) records that “There were a few Wesleyans in Micheldever from early in the 1820s; the group broke away and allied themselves with the Wesleyan Methodist Association in 1835, but were never strong.” The society “seems to have continued with the Wesleyan Methodist Association and United Methodist Free Churches until after 1887, its last mention on the plan” (Pillow (1995)). Vickers (1987:281-2) comments: “In their village work, the Associationists found themselves in danger of competing with the Primitive Methodists, but liked to think that their appeal was to a different class of people.” The WMA Magazine (1844:254) supplies a report on Micheldever:

Here we have a Society but no Chapel - the land being in the hand of one man who will not let us have a spot for a chapel. Some of our local brethren in this circuit, almost twenty years back, preached in this village with great success. But, for some years past, the influence of high church principles has been as the deadly night shade to the cause of spiritual religion. Although here, I have always had good congregations, yet, until very recently, there were no conversions - no increase.

This shows the difficulties which could be put in the way of Dissenting progress by a combination of squire and Church.

Robert Langford (Magazine 1875:746) was born in Woodmancott, four miles north-east of Micheldever, in 1798 and was converted in the Anglican Church as a young man. Soon after his conversion he preached in the evenings after work, in the open air, independently, in surrounding villages. Petty (1880:281) traces the movement of PMism to Micheldever from an account supplied by Langford which relates that a few small religious societies had been formed at Micheldever and some neighbouring villages about the year 1828, “on the principle of no paid ministry.” They evangelised in the surrounding hamlets, and met with a measure of success, but were unable to achieve a permanent establishment without a regular minister. It is likely that Vickers, Pillow and Petty refer to the same group.

Primitives

Micheldever, about six miles from Winchester, must claim attention for some while: it was the source from which the “great river” (the etymology of the name) of PMism flowed northwards, and the Micheldever Circuit was later renamed the Basingstoke Circuit. In 1810¹²⁹ Micheldever’s population was 485. The decennial census gives it in 1831 as 936; by 1851 it grew to 1082.

Langford and others sent a request for a missionary to the PMs in northern Hampshire, and Elizabeth Smith was deputed to visit them, and to stay a month on trial. At the end of the period Ride visited Micheldever in March 1832; a meeting was convened of the people who had sent the request, and the rules of the PMs were explained. They decided to unite with the Connexion, and Micheldever became a branch of Shefford circuit. Smith laboured there till June, having been appointed by the March quarterly meeting¹³⁰ to spend as much time as possible in the Micheldever and Winchester area. The Shefford Circuit wished to retain her for a further year, but she wished to move to a different circuit, and was stationed at Darlaston¹³¹. When the PMs came to Woodmancott, Langford joined them, and in 1833 or 1834 became a travelling preacher, including in the Shefford Circuit 1834-6.

Petty comments that it was the ‘prosperity’ of the work based on Shefford that encouraged the office-bearers to employ additional labourers and to appoint two mission stations, one for the neighbourhoods of Micheldever and Basingstoke, the other for Faringdon, then in Berkshire. By ‘prosperity’ he presumably meant primarily the spiritual success of the ministry.

Two preachers were sent in 1832 in Smith’s place; and “amidst hard toiling and much persecution the work gradually went on. The report of being false prophets, whoremongers, and adulterers was raised against the missionaries; and ignorant mobs, believing the report, thought they did God service in maltreating them; but the Lord sustained them, and crowned their labours with success.”¹³² The mission at Micheldever supplied¹³³ additional illustrations of ignorance and wickedness, and of the success of the gospel, from which Petty composes his account. He quotes from a report by Edward Bishop; here are some extracts, given at length as they also supply a much-needed picture of a camp meeting in that period:

129 Smith (2004)

130 Russell (2005:60)

131 Russell (2005:221)

132 Petty (1880:281)

133 Petty (1880:338ff.)

In the winter of 1833-4, we had a blessed work of God in this place, and the society numbered nearly one hundred members. The down on which the Winchester race-course runs lies about mid-way between Winchester and Mitcheldever. On this extensive down we held a camp-meeting on Sunday, May 25, 1834. Within a circle of a few miles there is a considerable number of villages, in several of which we had been most violently opposed, and in which we had not as yet been able to effect an establishment. It was expected that multitudes of persecutors from these places would be present at the camp meeting; and such were the apprehensions of our people, who well knew the temper and character of the inhabitants, that, for weeks previous to the Sabbath on which the meeting was held, their anxieties and prayers were chiefly concerning it. ... No farmer could be prevailed upon to lend us either waggon or cart for a pulpit. But when the appointed day arrived our friends met in the name of the Lord; and while we were engaged in the open prayer-meeting a splendid spring-van approached from the direction of Winchester. This belonged to a Mr. Topp, who then resided in the city. He was a spirited man, independent of favours and fearless of frowns. ... By ten o'clock we had a large congregation, composed principally, however, of our own friends. About this time another waggon arrived on the ground, which was also followed by a cart, in the same service. Mr. Topp had brought in his waggon a good supply of bread, cheese, and beef and at dinner time gave a general invitation to all present to partake of his bounty. Very different, however, were the contents of the other waggon and cart; and equally opposite were the principles and objects of their proprietors. These two vehicles were laden with barrels of beer, &c., which the parties placed and tapped close by the spot on which we had commenced our meeting. ... But as comparatively few besides our own friends were present, the morning services were concluded without any interruption, and were marked by much gracious influence. God, in an eminent manner, was in the singing, praying, and preaching, and the people were filled with faith and with the Holy Ghost.

Dinner was very soon despatched, and the societies from the various villages were severally grouped together and engaged in prayer. ... As two o'clock P.M. approached the people began to arrive from all the neighbourhood around, and great numbers from the city of Winchester. Probably there were present at one time in the afternoon from 5000 to 6000 persons; and no fewer than 3000 of them belonged to the ranks of our most violent persecutors. It was now that interruption, and even danger were apprehended. A deep solemnity pervaded the hearts of our people, and this gave a character to all the religious exercises, especially to the preaching

and praying. The Mitcheldever society constituted one of the praying companies; and its members prayed until it seemed as if heaven and earth were brought together ... and, contrary to our expectation, when we returned to the preaching stand for the second course of sermons, the vast concourse of people stood as if they were entranced; the preachers had extraordinary liberty, and the word was indeed with power; the people in prayer wrestled with God and prevailed, and the song of praise seemed to make the place a paradise. The entire day's services were brought to a close in peace; ...

This powerful meeting gave a mighty impetus to the kingdom of heaven in the county of Hampshire. The infant churches, which had been recently planted in the various surrounding villages, were greatly invigorated; while the hard moral soil of those neighbourhoods which had hitherto violently resisted our entrance into them, and which was so much in harmony with the flinty character of the material soil of the same localities, was, in several instances, softened into 'good ground,' to receive the 'good seed' of 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God.'

Imprisonment

The Shefford circuit appointed Ride and Bishop to attend the quarterly meeting of Micheldever branch on Tuesday, June 8, 1834, and to address an evangelistic meeting in the evening. They went to a patch of ground where they often preached and found a notice forbidding the meeting and threatening legal penalties. Bishop explains that, as they had only cottages to preach in, they were compelled to hold the meeting in the open-air. In fact they usually held their ordinary preaching services out of doors there in the summer, as the congregations were too large to be crowded into any dwelling-house. Some of their friends had made them aware of the notice at the quarterly meeting, which occasioned serious deliberation and prayer, resulting in the unanimous decision that it was their duty to hold the meeting, whatever consequences might follow.

This attempt to hinder the preachers by obstructing their open-air preaching under the pretence of law was a new form of opposition. They had not previously suffered a legal challenge against meeting there; they believed they were breaking no law; and, as will be seen, the authorities failed to secure a conviction. There was a large assembly of people, who behaved peaceably, and complied with their directions to stand so as not to obstruct the thoroughfare. However, a policeman named

Thomas Ellery was present, and demanded their names, behaving in a manner to provoke young men and boys to interrupt the meeting, though in fact none of them did. Ride and Bishop addressed the people, keeping to religious subjects, and making no reflections on the policeman's behaviour. The meeting closed in an orderly manner.

Shortly afterwards the summons reached them, under the seal of Sir Thomas Baring, Bart. (1772-1848) who owned 9000 acres and wielded considerable influence in the area. He is identified in Cobbett (1830:78-9):

Stratton Park is the seat of Sir THOMAS BARING, who has here several thousand acres of land; who has the living of Micheldever, to which, I think, Northington and Swallowfield are joined. Above all, he has Micheldever Wood, which, they say, contains a thousand acres, and which is one of the finest oak-woods in England.

On 3rd July Benjamin Forden (or Forder), a PM of North Waltham, wrote to him begging him to behave in a Christian manner in court. Stephen Leach of Whitchurch wrote on 16th July referring to "the hostility which you have manifested against some of the poor and simple and honest men reproachfully termed Ranters ... that you have employed a Police Officer to obstruct their public meetings and that a preacher John Meredith and two others were summoned to appear before the magistrates on Saturday the 5th inst at Winchester to answer a charge of assault alledged to have been committed by them on the said officer and for a breach of the peace." Leach pointed out that PM preaching did not excite immorality, drunkenness, crime, idleness, disaffection with the government or the legitimate authority of magistrates, or the duties of servants to masters, and commended "the poor ill used Ranters who regardless of consequences faithfully and boldly rush forward from their Ploughs and daily Labour to fight against the powers of darkness and spiritual ignorance."

Bishop recorded that the summons charged him and Ride, on the oath of Thomas Ellery, with heading a riotous mob, with being armed with bludgeons, and by force putting His Majesty's peaceful subjects in fear; and that they obstructed the thoroughfare.

On 26th June Bishop wrote to the magistrates who were to meet on 28th, saying that "In consequence of certain engagements, we shall not be able, as summoned, to appear at Winchester on the 28th Inst but, if possible, we will attend on Saturday July 5th; if not we will [illegible] as

soon as it shall be possible; and give one week's notice thereof to the Constable or Tythingman of Mitcheldever.”

On Saturday, July 19, 1834 they met the magistrates at Winchester. Investigation revealed that they had held a religious service, had not headed a riotous mob, and ought to have been discharged and their prosecutors made to bear their expenses. This would have defeated the object of their opposers, namely, the prevention of future open-air services. They were told that the prosecutors had no wish to punish them, and that if they would promise not to preach in the open-air at Mitcheldever again, they should be free to return home.

They replied that, as to punishment, they must first be convicted of crime, and as to liberty, they demanded it. They had preached on waste ground, had obstructed no thoroughfare, had a legal right to do so, and could not relinquish that right. It was plain to them that if they promised not to preach again in the open air, the same course would be taken at other places, and their evangelism would be widely crippled. Therefore they refused. The bench detained them until all the other business was concluded, and then made out their commitment to prison. Bishop continues:

We were then consigned to the care of the jailer; and, after the fatigue of a journey of thirty-two miles on a sultry July day, were sent supperless to our straw pallets in our solitary cells. ... We remained in prison until legal advice had been properly taken, and were then liberated on our own recognizances, August 1, 1834.

In Newbury people spent a night in prayer for them while they were in prison. They prepared to continue the case at the next Quarter Sessions, when they appeared again at Winchester, accompanied by nearly thirty witnesses, principally labouring men, who came to testify to their innocence and who, by doing so, risked conflict with their employers. It was now obvious that prosecutors could not obtain a verdict against them. Nearly all the magistrates withdrew, leaving the chairman almost alone on the bench. The attempt to prevent further open-air preaching, under the pretence of the law, was a scam; it had been demonstrated, as Bishop's report says, that “We were licensed preachers; ... we had a perfectly legal right to do what we had done.”

The character and mission of the preachers had been made known to the magistracy and gentry of the county more manifestly than they had ever been before; the preachers had been defended against the accusation of riotous and disorderly proceedings; and their opponents had been defeated in their attempts to hinder their work.

Secular reports give a different slant but the same basic facts. The Winchester quarter sessions were held in October 1834. Bishop and Ride (spelled Rhide) were accused of riot and assault by Ellery supported by seven witnesses. Ellery, supported by three witnesses, also accused William Merritt of the same charge: this is presumably the “John Meredith” mentioned in Leach’s letter to Sir Thomas Baring. All three appeared in person to answer the charges, but no record of the session has come to light. The *Hampshire Chronicle* of 20th October 1834 carries this article, which makes no mention of Meredith or Merritt:

Edw. Bishop and John Rhide were indicted for preaching in the highways at Mitcheldever, creating great confusion and riot, by assembling a number of persons, to the annoyance of the inhabitants. When brought before the Magistrates, Bishop and Rhide were offered to be released on their own recognizances, which they pertinaciously refused, and were consequently placed in confinement. Not liking their habitation, after a short period, they were bound to appear at these Sessions to answer the charge, on which they were convicted; and after much persuasion from the Chairman, they were prevailed on to give the required sureties to keep the peace, and not offend in future. The prosecution was then withdrawn.

The report records that Sir Thomas Baring was one of the magistrates, and the chairman was Richard Pollen Esq., presumably a relative of Sir Richard Hungerford Pollen, third baronet of Redenham, Hampshire.

Both the denominational and the journalistic reports agree that the prosecution was withdrawn. Consonant with this is the fact that the *Hampshire Advertiser* of 18th October 1834 reports only on those who “were found guilty and received sentence,” and makes no mention of Bishop, Ride, Meredith or Merritt.

Before the trial the PMs could seldom obtain a conviction against their persecutors, even though poor men, who opened their cottages for the services, had their windows broken, or windows and doors torn out. When the guilty parties were summoned before the magistrates, sufferers had been unable to obtain redress, and had sometimes been subjected to greater injuries from the persecutors afterwards. But after this trial they found less difficulty in obtaining redress.¹³⁴ Thus the trial proved beneficial to the movement, and they believed the hand of God had intervened.

134 Petty (1880:345-6)

By the March 1835 quarter day¹³⁵ the Shefford Circuit claimed 267 places on the preaching plan, 2280 members, 28 travelling preachers, 167 local preachers, 48 exhorters, 56 prayer leaders, and 22 chapels; membership had increased by 521 over the previous year¹³⁶. The Micheldever branch reported an increase of sixty members for the year, and was made into a separate circuit with 269 members, three travelling preachers and twenty-seven local preachers. Hannington and Kingsclere were at first included, but were returned to Shefford on account of their distance¹³⁷.

Very few Circuit Plans have survived, but one for July-October 1835 shows the Mitcheldever Circuit as including the following places in the area of this study:

Waltham	Dummer
Ellisfield	Hurstbourne Priors
Whitchurch	Tufton
Stratfield Saye	Bramley
Old Basing	Sherfield Green
Pamber	Ramsdell

(Throughout this thesis, it is assumed that Waltham is North Waltham; the Primitives also missioned Bishop's Waltham and eventually built a chapel there, but it was in the Droxford Circuit. Occasionally an entry for "Waltham" appears in a similar list as "North Waltham".)

There was a good deal of flux or instability in the work, as can be exemplified from the Circuit cash book. Taking only Dummer, North Waltham and Ellisfield as examples, the following picture emerges:

135 Magazine (1836:378), extracts from John Ride's Journal

136 Magazine (1836:378)

137 Account book, March, 1835

March, 1835	Dummer +Waltham; [Ellisfield absent]
June	Dummer+ Ellisfield Waltham
August, Nov.	Dummer Ellisfield Waltham
all 1836	Dummer+Ellisfield Waltham
Sept., 1837 + June 1838	Dummer Ellisfield Waltham

Membership at Ellisfield when a separate society was 4, 6, then 2. Ellisfield is missing in 1842, and back again in 1848 with 5 members. In 1851 it has 4. The membership at Waltham as a separate society in this period lurched between 13 and 26, and Dummer ranged from 9 to 13. The Wesleyans had registered a place for worship in Dummer in 1828 but faded out. Thus societies fused and separated, and membership rose and fell. Wesleyans came and went. This is a picture of ebb and flow, not of steady uninterrupted advance.

Much trial and persecution still awaited the societies, and in March, 1836, the number of members had reduced to 200. The year following there was an increase of 40. They had to preach out of doors at nearly half the places even in winter, being unable to obtain houses in which to hold their services, through the opposition of landlords. Despite the difficulties they succeeded in founding several new societies.

In March 1838¹³⁸ the Circuit report says that:

Generally where we have houses to preach in, we have large congregations; the societies are prospering, and the converting work is moving. In regard to persecution, we are happy to say that its violence and brutality are much abated. But we are still fought as determinedly as ever, in regard to getting houses to preach in. The people are threatened with loss of house or employment, or both, if they admit any of our meetings into their houses; and few, very few, in these circumstances, can be found, who will “lose their life for Christ and his gospel’s sake.”

This difficulty is a recurring motif in these years. Yet the Mitcheldever Plan for 1836 and 1838 had spread northwards significantly for its Sunday services:

Oakley	West [sc. Monk] Sherborne
Weston [Corbett? Patrick?]	Newnham Green
Herriard	Overton
Steventon	Mapledurwell
Ellisfield	Cliddesden
Nutley	Rotherwick
Bramley	Little London
Sherborne St John	Pamber
Newfound	Upton Grey

By March 1841 the Circuit had 420 members, and the Magazine reports concerning the circuit that “the Lord has poured prosperity upon us, and many have been converted.”

In 1843 or early 1844 the PMs came within one day of acquiring premises for a chapel at Micheldever, but their desire was thwarted. The story is told at length in the Magazine (1845:278-83). William Thorn, Independent minister at Winchester, in order to support the PMs, wrote to the editor saying:

I had written two or three letters to Sir Thomas Baring, of Stratton Park, remonstrating with him for unjustly purchasing a house and cottage at Northbrook¹³⁹, to prevent the Primitive

138 Magazine (1838:424)

139 Northbrook, in the parish of Micheldever

Methodists from erecting a chapel on the site. Since my last appeal to Sir Thomas I have waited more than three months, hoping that on due reflection he might discover the impiety of his conduct, and restore the property to those to whom in equity it belongs.

But up to this time, he has taken no step to remedy the evil he had inflicted, or to counteract the effects of his persecuting procedure; nor is there now any prospect that he will attempt either.

The long article goes on to cite the letters Thorn had written to Sir Thomas:

2nd February, 1844

I fear you will deem me improperly officious in sending you the subsequent remarks; but as they solely concern the cause of Christ and the salvation of souls, in which you avowedly take a lively interest, I think you will pardon the intrusion.

The Primitive Methodists had agreed to purchase, of Mr. Winkworth, a cottage and garden at Northbrook, for £100, on which to erect a chapel for the worship of God. The time was fixed, and had all but arrived for signing the agreement and settling the bargain; in fact they had virtually and morally bought the premises.

The evening previous to the legal accomplishment of this object, the Rev. Mr. Clark, having, by some means, heard of the transaction, applied either to you personally or to your steward, and persuaded you, or him in your name, to offer the seller £20 more for the property than its real value, or than the Primitives were to have paid for it. This was immediately done; and the cottage and garden were wrested from their hands, adding to the ample estate of Sir Thomas Baring.

The manifest motive of Mr. Clark was to prevent the Primitives from having a suitable place in which to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, and, if possible, ultimately to drive them out of the parish and neighbourhood altogether. This, I hear, he has openly avowed, and exults in his superior generalship in the transaction. The Lord pardon his iniquity!

Despite the opposition and persecution, the following circuits were formed from the original Mitcheldever Circuit:

Sherfield Green	1842
Bishop's Waltham	1843
Winchester	1853

Basingstoke and nearby villages

The 1834-5 Plan for the Mitcheldever Branch includes week-night meetings at places near Basingstoke: Tadley, Basingstoke, Monk Sherborne, East Sherborne, Ramsdell, Mortimer West End, Silchester, Dummer, North Waltham.

There was a Wesleyan family at Sherfield (sometimes spelled Shirfield) Green, through whom the PM mission found root in that village. Magazine (1837:51-3) relates the story. William Taphouse was born there in July 1783. His first deep religious convictions came under the preaching of an Independent minister at Basingstoke, but were “checked by uninformed advisers”, and he lived in perpetual fear of an awful end to his life. Also, he was much addicted to swearing. Later, when still young, he went with a friend to hear the Wesleyans, after which he came to faith, opened his house for preaching, and became a class leader and local preacher. Death was a frequent visitor to his home. Of his fourteen children, six died in infancy, and a son died aged 17. In 1831 his daughter Ann was converted among the PMs, and died in 1832.

In December 1833 the Shefford Circuit opened a mission in and around Sherfield Green. William joined them, and opened his house for their preaching, but for this he was evicted. Nonetheless he continued to help the work. He preached his last sermon at the camp meeting held at Sherfield Green in August 1835, and died on 3rd February 1836.

On 4th June 1837 Bishop preached at Old Basing and Sherfield Green. At the latter, “several professed to have their evidence of justification powerfully renewed, and their enjoyments deepened.” The following day he did visiting, and preached on the green at Stratfield Saye. Some

left their horses and carts at the beer-shop, came across smoking their pipes, and heard peaceably. But he makes a general comment on 11th June to the effect that:

Some slander; some oppress; some write; some print; and others circulate hand bills, tracts, etc. When it comes to opening houses, forming societies, and getting the people converted, the opposition is still more serious. Employers and landlords are now used by the enemy as the instruments of vengeance, and the result too frequently is, we are obliged to preach out of doors summer and winter for years, without reaping the fruit of our labours. We persevere in preaching the plain truth in streets, lanes, fields, highways, and hedges.

“The enemy” is Satan, who was a vivid reality to the PMs. It emerges again that if there was no building on which they could rely, they often found serious difficulty in gathering a permanent congregation.

George Watts, born in Leckford, Hampshire, in 1815, entered the ministry in 1836, and was stationed in Micheldever in 1837. In January 1838¹⁴⁰ he visited many families in Sherfield Green and found the members pressing onward. The September 1839 Mitcheldever Circuit quarterly meeting decided “that Bro J. Champion be appointed to labour the next quarter chiefly on the Sherfield Green part.” By 1840¹⁴¹ the society had fourteen members, but the cause was low. The village was missioned again, and scores attended, prompted partly by the conversion of a “very wicked man”. Conversions began happening, for several weeks together there was a meeting every night, and more than fifty people “found redemption in the blood of the Lamb.”

The March 1842 Micheldever quarterly meeting agreed to make Sherfield Green into a branch of the circuit, in association with the Alton Mission, and that John Butcher and Sister [presumably Sarah] Price should be appointed to serve there. The September 1842 circuit account book records a branch membership of 55, plus 5 on trial and 10 in the new category of ‘doubtful’. By March 1844 this had risen to 100, 33 and 2 respectively.

Sherfield upon Loddon

At Sherfield upon Loddon, in a chapel built in 1810, the 1851 census records 33 + 25 children present in the morning, and 50 in the evening. The minister was George Brown of Sherfield. There

140 George Watts’s Journal, quoted in the Magazine (1839:157)

141 Magazine (1841:339)

must be some discrepancy here, unless the society had purchased an 1810 chapel from a different congregation.

Basing (Old Basing)

At Old Basing a mob knocked George Wallis down three times, trampled on him, and left him for dead. Basing first appears in the circuit account book in September 1840. It was added to the plan by the June 1852 circuit quarterly meeting.

Oakley, Newfound, Deane, Wootton St Lawrence

Oakley came on to the Micheldever Plan in March 1838, according to the quarterly meeting minutes, along with Newfound. There is a Minute in the Circuit committee's minute book for November 1839 that a certain Brother H (Knox?) should preach at Oakley and Newfound on 17th of that month. However, in November 1843 the same committee decided that Oakley preaching should be "given up till spring", but it came back on the plan by decision of the quarterly meeting of March 1845, together with "Dean" and "Wooton", no doubt today's Deane and Wootton St Lawrence. Before 1866, at Oakley "for some considerable time"¹⁴², the PMs met in two cottages, later known as Hunters Moon, in Hill Road. A chapel was opened in 1866. Prior to the opening of the 1870 chapel at Wootton St Lawrence, PM meetings had been held in the old Pit Hall and in a cottage in the main street¹⁴³. It has not been possible to discover when they began.

Dummer

There is a Minute in the Mitcheldever Circuit committee's minute book that a person with an illegible surname should preach at Dummer on 1st December, 1839. George Wallis reported in the 1841 Magazine that a protracted meeting was held "which was crowned with the blessing of God; many were converted and we have an increase of eleven members."

¹⁴² *Oakley - the last 100 Years* (1994) Ros Blackman Sally Warner, Oakley and Deane Parish Council

¹⁴³ Centenary leaflet

Newnham

Newnham became part of the Sherfield Green branch of the Mitcheldever Circuit. The 1844 and 1846 Magazines relate that more than ten years had passed since Newnham was first visited. The PMs were not pelted with stones or other missiles, but they met many discouragements. For years they used the village green as a preaching place in the summer, but few persons listened, and those who did listened from their doors.

The work was given up, but the Circuit planned to renew the effort in the spring of 1843, and “a spirit of hearing was poured upon the people”. A place was offered as a preaching room, on condition that the PMs bore the cost of fitting it up suitably. Several people were converted, and soon there was a society of nineteen members, and a good congregation for services.

One of the members rented a large house and opened a grocer’s shop. Attached to his premises was a dilapidated stable, which the PMs fitted up as a comfortable preaching room at a cost of about £12 provided by members and friends. This was soon filled with attentive hearers, and a society was formed, which flourished for a while. But then the society was again obliged to worship in the open air, or to pay a shilling and sixpence a week as rent for the preaching room. They rented it for ten weeks, and then again had to leave and meet in a member’s small cottage. Opposition increased, and two weeks later they were back in the open air, even when the weather was unfavourable.

The preachers met scorn, ridicule and sarcasm. Their characters were widely denigrated. But they prayed fervently that God would intervene, and it became possible once more to rent the old preaching room at a cost of a shilling a week. Nonetheless, their freedom to occupy it was precarious. Fervent prayer was offered day and night for a plot of freehold land, till a publican sold them six perches of land, on which the chapel was opened in 1846 and drew large congregations. Here is evidence as elsewhere of a society’s need for a permanent meeting place, and of the importance given to prayer. A photograph of the chapel appears in the Appendix, illustrating the simple architecture of the period.

According to figures in the possession of the present owners of the chapel, the membership declined seriously in the period 1844-8, the annual tally being 16, 30, 15, 13, 9. Nonetheless, at the 1851 census there were 22 in attendance in the morning, and 80 in the evening. The minister at the time was George Lee, of Basingstoke.

“East Sherborne”

East Sherborne is an old name for Sherborne St John. At the time of the religious census, a PM house meeting recorded 61 present in the afternoon and 126 in the evening.

North Waltham

There is no known record of a Methodist group in North Waltham before 1837, when a licence was granted for the building of a chapel¹⁴⁴. A document at the Hampshire Record Office records that the old malthouse¹⁴⁵, purchased in 1837, was converted, becoming part preaching house, part dwelling. The chapel was opened¹⁴⁶ in April 1838 by Ride and Miss S. Price of Andover. Russell (1886:460) adds a few details, quoting Ride’s Journal:

Friday. Twenty-two miles to Waltham. Arrived at Brother Bishop’s, and found him very ill.

Saturday 22. Assisted sister Price in opening their new chapel; two souls converted.

Monday 23. Visited the people, and preached at night.

There is a Minute in the Mitcheldever Circuit’s quarterly meeting for March 1839 that “there be preaching out-of-doors every Sunday at North Waltham at 1½ o’clock.”

The chapel drew 50 people on the morning of the religious census, and 135 in the evening. Their minister at the time was George Lee of Basingstoke. Average congregations were 40 in the morning and 130 in the evening¹⁴⁷, perhaps because agricultural labourers were freer from their duties of an evening.

Stratfield Saye, Ellisfield

The 1846 Magazine records conversions at Stratfield Saye. Ellisfield has been mentioned a number of times.

144 *North Waltham, Hampshire*, L. F. Hewley

145 *Magazine* (1839:421)

146 Centenary leaflet, 1964

147 1851 census

Basingstoke

As a market town, Basingstoke differed from the surrounding villages. There was less social conservatism, and persecution was therefore milder, though Edward Bishop preached in the open air at Totterdown on the north side of Basingstoke and experienced much opposition¹⁴⁸. In November 1835 he was one of the signatories to a licence registering a house occupied by Robert Moody, a hair dresser, for religious worship. Basingstoke first came on the plan regularly from March 1840. Preachers met with opposition. William Merritt was arrested and held in custody for preaching in the open air, till a few hours later some friends from the Independent Church secured his release.¹⁴⁹

When Basingstoke first appeared in the circuit account book in September 1840, there were as yet no members, but the work sent nine shillings that quarter. In September 1841, whilst there were still no members, a missionary meeting raised £1/1/6. In September 1842 there were still no members, but the Circuit committee nonetheless agreed that “if a suitable place can be obtained at a reasonable rent to preach in at Basingstoke, we empower Bro. Harvey to take it.” (This would be the William Harvey whom Hugh Bourne visited in the winter of 1843-4: it is important to note once more the fact that the Hampshire work was embedded in the national mission and in direct touch with its founders.) By December 1842 there were three full members, and nine on trial. In November 1843 the Circuit committee agreed to attempt to get land for a chapel.

At first the PMs in Basingstoke used a courtyard in Bunnian Place, whilst hearers stood in the road. Later they met in a timber yard¹⁵⁰. This was suitable in summer, but inconvenient in winter. When George Price came to the circuit in 1845 they still had no place of worship, and the congregations were small.¹⁵¹ Arthur Attwood wrote in about 1980 an undated Gazette publication entitled *Look in the Past* (page 16), in which he says:

Before the Primitive Methodists had their own chapel, they worshipped in a barn on the opposite side of the road. This was near where the Pear Tree Inn was built just over a hundred years ago. ... on the site of a house where a brewer by the name of Hinde lived. Behind the house was one of Basingstoke's small breweries belonging to Messrs Barrett and Hinde.

148 Baigent & Millard (1889:550-1)

149 Magazine 1847

150 Baigent & Millard (1889:550-1)

151 Magazine 1847

A report associated with the Wesleyans, that Methodists once met in a loft behind the Pear Tree Inn, is perhaps a muddled piece of folk memory, helped by the fact that the Wesleyans met in a room over an old granary entered by means of a ladder. Sadly Attwood supplied no contemporary evidence for this location for the PMs, but as a long-term amateur local historian, born in the town in 1916, he doubtless had access to local knowledge and tradition which has not otherwise survived. It may be that the Wesleyan and Primitive meetings, though distant in time, were nonetheless close in location, but it will perhaps never be known who met near the Pear Tree Inn before the PMs built their chapel on the opposite side of the road. Again in March 1846, three people were appointed “to try for a suitable place to preach in at Basingstoke.”

Membership figures grew as follows:

	<u>Full</u>	<u>On Trial</u>	<u>Doubtful</u>
Dec 1842	3	9	0
March 1843	7	2	0
June	6	0	3
Sept	7	1	1
Dec	8	0	0
March 1844	7	1	0
Sept	9	0	0
Dec	8	2	1
March 1845	11	0	1
June	11	0	0
Sept	10	0	1
Dec	10	0	1
March 1846	11	0	0
June	10	0	1
Sept	10	0	1
Dec	11	0	0
March 1847	18	4	0
June	20	4	1
Sept	23	0	0

Thereafter membership is given only for the entire “Basingstoke Branch”, beginning with 106 full members, and 7 on trial.

The circuit’s efforts to build a chapel succeeded, and the Circuit committee decided in May 1846 “that we accept the two houses offered at Basingstoke.” The Minutes for June 1846 also resolve

“That Trustees be permitted to purchase the two cottages adjoining the premises at a reasonable price.” In September, the same Minute book records the decision to “commence building a house and chapel at Basingstoke as soon as possible.” A site was purchased on the south side of Flaxfield Road, opposite the Pear Tree public house, and a house and chapel were built. The chapel was opened in 1847¹⁵². Opening services and a tea meeting were held on 25th, 28th, 29th March and 4th April. It was felt that “a gracious unction attended the several discourses and addresses.” At the 1851 religious census Basingstoke recorded 40 in attendance in the morning, 40 in the afternoon, and 100 in the evening.

Basingstoke Branch

The circuit account book for June 1851 lists the following membership returns for places which fall within the area of this study:

	<u>full</u>	<u>on trial</u>
Down Hurstbourne ¹⁵³	20	10
Whitchurch	22	5
Waltham	13	12
Dummer	16	15
Sherfield	12	0
Stratfield Saye	2	0
Ellisfield	4	0
Newnham	0	7

152 *ibid.*:374

153 Hurstbourne Priors

Worting+Wootton¹⁵⁴ had an unspecified total of 4. Worting had been on the Micheldever Plan, but came off as early as June, 1835¹⁵⁵. In March 1844 the Micheldever quarterly meeting decided that preaching at Worting should be held at 1.30 p.m.. Efforts there were presumably sporadic, and it may be significant that the Independents had a house meeting there on Census Sunday, numbering 26, and a later chapel that endured into living memory.

Hurstbourne Priors registered a congregation of 110 on the Sunday of the 1851 Census. They were meeting at that period in a member's kitchen .

The following ministers were stationed at Sherfield Green and Basingstoke¹⁵⁶:

	<u>Sherfield Green</u>	<u>Basingstoke</u>
1842	W. Hazell, J. Butcher	
1843	W. Hazell	
1844-5	J. Wright	
1846	John Butterworth	
1847	J. Symmonds	
1848		George Eudell (Eudall)
1849		Edmund Hancock
1850-2		(none)

154 St Lawrence

155 quarterly minutes

156 Leary (1980)

E: SUMMARY

Time-line of the early Primitive Methodist Movement

The first table lists significant dates before, during and continuing the PM expansion in northern Hampshire. This is followed by a map showing the spread of the movement from Shefford to Micheldever, Andover and Reading, and from Reading to the Silchester area. Finally a 'genealogy' of circuits concludes this narrative of events and personnel.

Prelude:

1824 Samuel Heath comes to Wiltshire

1826 Brinkworth becomes head of a new circuit

1829 Berkshire mission begins

1830-52:

1830 Elizabeth Smith preaches in the Bourne Valley, Hants.

1831 Thomas Russell and Elizabeth Smith appointed to Hampshire

1832 Shefford Circuit formed, including the Hampshire Mission

Elizabeth Smith to Micheldever

Micheldever becomes a branch of the Shefford Circuit

1833 Andover mission inaugurated

PM preaching at Sherfield Green

1834 PM preaching at Silchester

1835 Mitcheldever Circuit formed

Reading Mission formed

1837 Andover Circuit formed from Shefford Circuit

Reading Circuit formed

1846 Shefford Circuit renamed Newbury Circuit

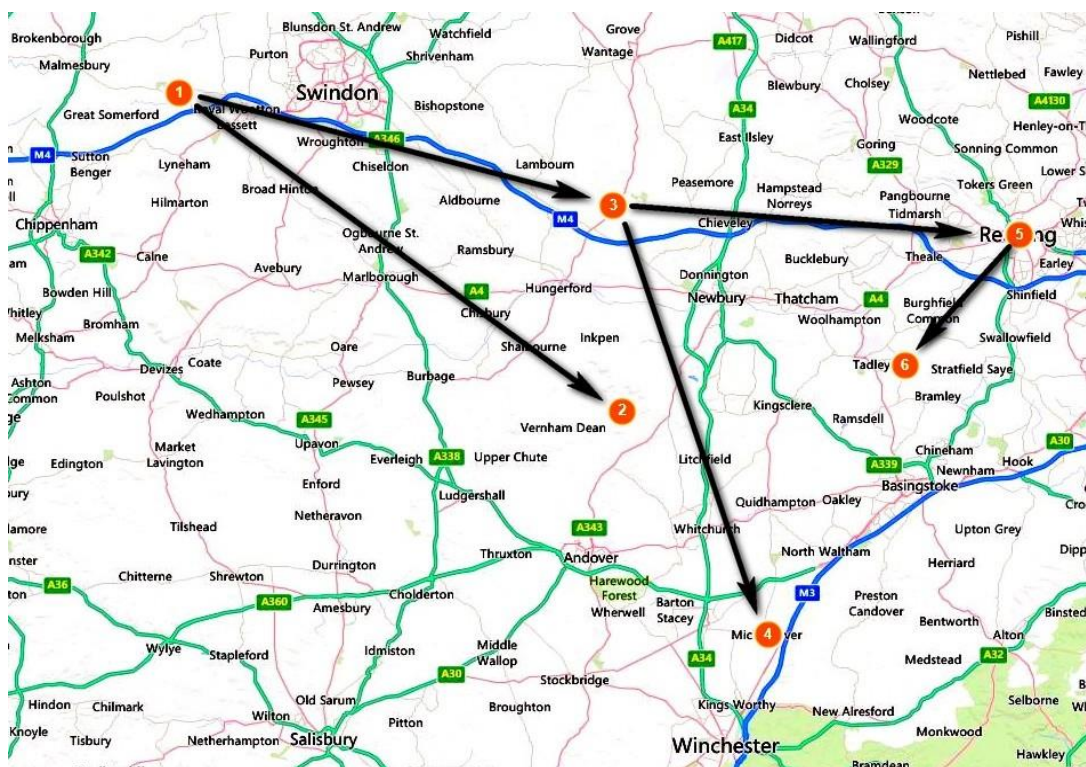
Sequel:

1853 Mitcheldever Circuit renamed Basingstoke Circuit

1866 Silchester branch of the Reading Mission

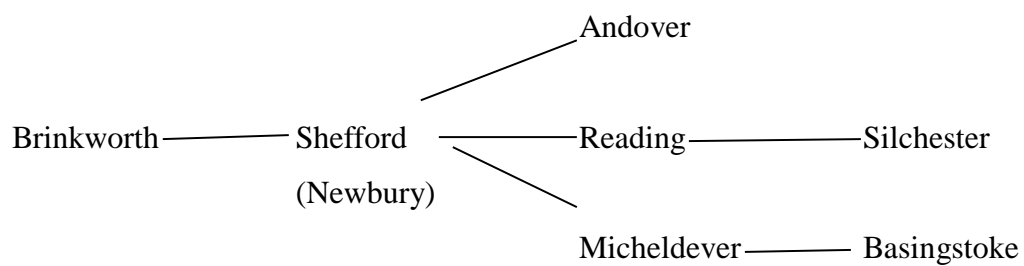
1870 Silchester Circuit formed

THE ROUTES INTO NORTHERN HAMPSHIRE



1. Brinkworth
2. Faccombe
3. Shefford
4. Micheldever
5. Reading
6. Silchester

CIRCUITS



Brinkworth	1827
Shefford	1832
renamed Newbury	1846
Micheldever	1835
Basingstoke branch	1848-1852
renamed Basingstoke	1853
Whitchurch branch	1850
Andover	1837
Reading	1837
Sherfield Green	1842-1847

The circuits studied ended the period with the following memberships recorded in the annual Minutes of Conference:

	1850	1851	1852	1853
Reading	630	640	650	655
Mitcheldever/Basingstoke	337	367	367	370
Newbury	990	1042	1070	1020
Andover	602	635	640	575

CHAPTER 6:

BALANCING THE OBLOQUY

Following the original narrative in Chapter 5, the thesis now offers in Chapters 6-7 a critique of the movement's ethos and of disapproving and admiring comment from a range of academic and popular writers from the contemporary period to the present day. The discussion focuses first on three aspects of the religion which commentators have deplored, and in each case challenges the detraction. Chapter 7 turns to three targets of admiration, namely Heroism (under two heads), Feminism, and Socialism, modifying the eulogy by drawing attention to features which hagiographers downplay or conceal (A), less winsome aspects of the religion (B), misunderstanding (C), and historicity (D).

The arguments are not grounded primarily in the social and political struggles of the nineteenth century, but rather, consonant with the emic approach of the thesis, in the attempt to appreciate the inner world of belief, aspiration and experience of early PMism. Yet it is not possible wholly to separate this from its socio-cultural context, which is frequently referred to as the background of the religion.

The Methodology mentioned the view, advanced by Derrida, that everything is interpretation. Chapter 5 traced the events and identified the personalities. Each interpretation of those events is determined by an interpretive community from within its own context. Chapters 6-7 now seek to set the interpretation put upon the historical events by the early PM community beside interpretations proposed from other contexts by a range of scholarly and popular commentators. The Literature Review noted that over the past century the voices of later interpreters have tended to make the early PMs' own discourse less audible and less familiar, and this discussion, building on Chapter 5, aims to make the recovery and understanding of those earlier voices part of its contribution to knowledge.

A: FOLK RELIGION

A salient and repetitive theme, noted repeatedly in the narrative in Chapter 5, is the belief that God intervenes on behalf of his people, as Sheard (1980:780-1) writes:

The hand of God was readily perceived in a whole range of situations and circumstances. ... belief in the universal and particular providence of God. ... the providential care exercised by the Almighty over his saints, and conversely, the reality of a 'retributive Providence'.

The PMs worked this belief out continually in prayer and expectation of God's working among and around them. Scattered throughout the above narrative are examples of prayer, both individual and corporate, sometimes coupled with fasting, in supplication to the God whose active response they believed they could expect. Such divine action runs like a *Leitmotiv* through this study of their life. This section expands the theme of God's perceived providence and intervention, offering from the lives of Hampshire leaders and congregations examples which they interpreted as divine intervention on their behalf, giving ample evidence that this was a persistent feature of the movement's ethos.

The section also demonstrates that folk religion had significant overlap with this aspect of PMism, as Johnson (1993:73-4, 79) wrote: "There is a close link between Primitive Methodism and some elements of folk culture, such as visions, dreams, omens, magic and even witchcraft and exorcism, ... the earth and the atmosphere the locals inhabited was charged with the supernatural. ... the world-view of Dissident Methodism provided a link through their religious symbolism to a folk past rooted in nature." Valenze (1985:137) observes that PMism "mixed easily with folk beliefs". Likewise, Hatcher (1993), Obelkevich (1976), Ambler (1989) and Bebbington (2012) observed this overlap between PM and folk beliefs, confirming that it made PMism attractive and accessible to rural populations at a time when society, including the Established Church, was increasingly downplaying such beliefs. PM piety and the popular religion of the countryside shared belief in signs, *post mortem* appearances, the Devil, and divine intervention for guidance, deliverance or judgement. This enabled people to feel at ease amongst the PMs, whilst simultaneously town-dwellers and the élite of society were becoming more sceptical.

This thesis does not use the phrase 'popular religion' pejoratively. Beliefs common to the PMs and the rustic mind are identified, but no attempt is made to assess whether they are true or false. Both

offered a vivid awareness of the spiritual world, facilitating country folk's response to the message of an almighty God who loves believers and intervenes on their behalf.

Folk Beliefs in scholarly Literature

In 2000 Oxford University Press published *A Dictionary of English Folklore* compiled by Simpson and Roud. Entries are listed alphabetically and show the following:

- Poltergeists found in English sources from Elizabethan times.
- Notable storms seen as omens or signs of God's wrath.
- Dreams conveying true information or warnings sent by God.
- Dogs able to sense anything uncanny, with many supernatural dogs found in folklore.
- Evil forces including devils actively bringing harm.
- Ghosts in all periods.
- "Cunning men and women" common throughout the 19th century, able to heal sickness or foresee the future.
- Curses invoking God's power, generally by a clergyman, sometimes by a person deeply wronged.
- The Devil as a powerful tempter.
- Exorcism of haunted houses.
- Thunder perceived as the voice of God, reported till the 16th century.
- Calamities to punish wrongdoers, and to warn others.

Also, the Bible was used in various forms of divination all over England, showing that it was deemed a numinous book.

Keith Thomas (1971)¹⁵⁷ in *Religion and the decline of magic* draws his survey of sixteenth and seventeenth century England to a close in a section entitled *Survival*, which confirms the conclusions of scholars cited above in their studies of rural PMism:

By the nineteenth century traditional magical beliefs were largely restricted to the more intimate communities of the English countryside.

157 (1973 edition: 797-8 London, UK: Penguin)

It is therefore possible to connect the decline of the old magical beliefs with the growth of urban living, the rise of science, and the spread of an ideology of self-help. ... The only identifiable social group which was consistently in the van of the campaign against certain types of magic is the clergy, but their attitude to supernatural claims in general was highly ambivalent. ...

What can, however, be clearly seen is that by the mid seventeenth century the new intellectual developments had greatly deepened the gulf between the educated classes and the lower strata of the rural population. ... Nineteenth-century students of popular folklore discovered everywhere that the inhabitants of rural England had not abandoned their faith in healing wells, divination, cunning folk, witchcraft, omens or ghosts.

Folk Belief in Hampshire

Very little has been written specifically about the folk beliefs of Hampshire beyond Boase (1976) who supplies examples of a wronged person's effectual curse, a religious vision, an audible voice speaking prophetically, a word heard and heeded from a deceased Christian, significant dreams, divine punishment for sacrilege, ghosts (including ones associated with Winchester, Basing, Vernham Dean, Combe, and the vicinity of Basingstoke), and haunted houses. Also, "There are many folk stories about real animals ... Animals and birds have often been credited with superior powers and understanding" (pages 109, 111). These things were believed in the Hampshire countryside, and the experiences among PMs which now follow, and which the PMs attributed to God, resonated strongly with them and helped make PMism a meaningful religion to which rural folk could relate. Thomas Hardy, depicting life in his native nearby rural Dorset in 1842-3 (*The Return of the Native* (Book 6, Chapter 1)) writes that "the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still: ... fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way to have survived."

Hampshire PMism

Dreams

The PMs sought to align their religion with the Bible, which supplies many examples of divinely given dreams. Russell (1886:460) writes of Aaron Bell, a colleague of John Ride and John Guy,

who “received a letter from one of his sisters to say that she had three times dreamed of her brother being killed and thrown into a river, and that the body was identified by his watch and pocket book.” On 21st August 1838 “he turned aside to bathe in a back stream of the Thames. A boy seeing some clothes lying on the bank raised an alarm, some watermen came, and on searching found the dead body of brother Bell. From his pocket book they discovered his name.”

Elizabeth Smith (Russell 1869:171ff) relates that even in childhood, “My impressions were attended with dreams; ... I beheld the Judge open a book, in which (it was told me) the names of all that were saved were written. I thought I stood guilty before the Judge, ... After this dream that scripture followed me for some time, ‘Stand in awe, and sin not ...’ I am convinced these fears did not arise from natural timidity, nor from human influence, but from the Spirit of God.”

Presentiment of Death

Forewarnings of the time or manner of death are also found in scripture, for example King Hezekiah or the Apostle Peter. In December 1872, Ride’s widow felt a hand upon her shoulder and heard what she felt was an actual voice saying, “Set your house in order; before this time next year you will be in your grave.” Later that month she was taken ill and diagnosed with cancer. She died in November 1873¹⁵⁸. Antliff (1892:304) presents several evidences that Hugh Bourne believed for some fifteen years that he would die in 1852, which he did.

However these experiences may be interpreted, the Magazine perceived them as divine intimations, as in the manner it records (1825:411-3) the drowning of preacher Elizabeth Elliott in 1825. Preaching at Porthywaun, Shropshire, in April 1825 she “spoke the most solemn words I ever heard drop from the lips of a minister,” repeating three times, “This may be the last time I shall speak to you in this place.” Six days later she was drowned crossing the river at Pant, greatly swollen by the floods from the mountains in consequence of the rains.

Audible Voice

The Prophet Samuel heard the voice of God calling him repeatedly. On the afternoon of 23rd April, when Elizabeth Elliott was drowned, “she heard a voice from heaven, loud and clear, which said

158 Russell (1886:588), Magazine (1875:553-4)

twice, 'Come to glory, come to glory!' She answered, 'I am coming.' And turning herself round, she saw no person."

Russell (1886:12) recounts Ride's conversion in the winter of 1811-2, aged 21:

I thought I heard a voice speaking, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." I looked round to see who spoke, but no human being was to be seen. Such love, joy and glory filled my soul ... I shouted, "Glory to God! He has pardoned all my sins!"

Divine Protection

Russell (1869:208) relates "a remarkable preservation she [Elizabeth Smith] experienced one day in going to her appointment. In going by a farm yard, a very large and apparently savage dog came out to her and smelled at her. The dog kept close to her, and she went on. She had a considerable distance to travel, and her way lay through some solitary woods, in which that part of Hampshire abounds; and coming to a narrow part of the road, where there were no inhabitants, and where thick woods were on either hand, she saw two very ill-looking men. Fear started in her mind that they intended her some evil. But the dog came up close to her; and, as if he was to be her guard, kept close to her side. Terror seemed to strike the men. She went past them; and the dog attended her to the door where she was going; but she could not get the dog to go in; he went away and she saw him no more. But she acknowledged the hand of Providence." The biblical stories of Elijah, Daniel or Jonah, among others, convince those who draw their religion from the Bible to believe that animals are subject to God's overruling.

Divine Guidance or Assurance concerning the Future

That God guides his servants is a recurrent motif in scripture from the lives of Noah and Abraham onwards. Russell (1886:77) relates that Ride's first wife, who died aged 27 after they had emigrated to America for a career in farming, "counselled her husband to return to England, as she was impressed the Lord had a work for him to do in the old country. ... Mr. Ride resolved to follow his wife's dying injunction."

In February 1830, early in the Berkshire mission, Ride and Russell¹⁵⁹ prayed together for hours in a snowy coppice till Russell sprang to his feet with the assurance “yonder country is ours, and we will have it.” Within three years there were nearly thirteen hundred members in the circuit. The incident entered, as it were, into the bloodstream of the denomination, became an item in its self-perception, and is referred to by many writers.

William Peacefull lived in Shefford 1836-7, was assistant to John Ride, and was trained by him for future superintendency. Dorricott (1878:35-6) records an instance recorded in Peacefull’s Journal:

While I was visiting from house to house at Aldbourne and in its vicinity, I felt impressed to go to a lonely farm house at some distance from the others. The master and mistress I found both in bed, dangerously ill. ... near the point of death.

He explained the Gospel to them, prayed, and promised to return the same evening after preaching. They both believed, and rejoiced “with a sweet hope of glory in their souls.” They died the next day, “triumphant in the faith,” and Peacefull felt convinced that it was the Lord who had impressed him to visit their home.

Magazine (1832:220) records Elizabeth Smith’s Journal for 3rd February 1832, after she learnt she was to work at Micheldever: “I was persuaded the Lord had a work for us to do in that part of the country.”

Divine Wrath against Mockers

After leaving Hampshire, Elizabeth Smith wrote to her old associates in the Shefford Circuit from Bilston, and the Magazine (1833:31-2) published her letter dated 21st August 1832, at which time 30 to 40 people a day were dying of cholera where she served:

But some mock at sin and death. A stout-hearted sinner at Horsley Heath, went home, and finding that his family were gone to a meeting, he cursed both them and the cholera. He was soon seized with it, ... he writhed in a agony. A pious person exhorted him to pray. But he said, “I see hell is ready for me! Don’t you see the devils? There are legions waiting for me!” We may truly say, “Who knoweth the power of thine anger, thou righteous Judge of all!”

159 Ritson (1911:130)

Misfortune as divine Judgement

Ride and Bishop supply a report that when the preachers first came to evangelise the village of C⁻¹⁶⁰ (probably Combe), a farmer said he would rather lose all his stock than that PMism should gain a footing. He gave money and beer to a number of young men, and said he did not mind what they did, as long as they drove the preachers out; “and from them, we, for some time suffered much. But the Almighty did not forget the farmer.” At the next lambing, from 700 ewes he saved only about 200 lambs, and large numbers of dead ones were removed in his own carts; and PMism gained the footing he had sought to obstruct.

A recurring motif throughout this thesis is the PMs’ desire to align their religion with the Bible, in which they found words like, “the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies” (Isaiah 66:14), confirming to them that such events were divine interventions.

“The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven” - Psalm 77:18

Harriet Wallis and William Hazell (stationed in Sherfield Green 1842-4) were both from Ramsbury, where William Peacefull¹⁶¹ records a Sunday evening service when “a most awful storm of thunder and lightning and hail broke over the neighbourhood. ... the thunder-peals became so terrific that the chapel shook.” Sitting down, he announced, “I shall now leave the Almighty to preach the sermon.” Several of the most hardened and bitter persecutors were at the chapel door, and were driven inside by the storm. As the storm beat furiously against the windows, inside “all was quiet as death and solemn as the judgement” and “a tremendous spiritual shaking took place.” The service continued for three hours, awe fell upon the persecutors, and “three or four of those dreadfully wicked men” were converted that night.

Magazine (1834:65-9) printed an account of a disastrous storm which raged from 31st August till 2nd September 1833:

160 Magazine (1835:30)

161 Dorricott (1878:36-7)

with irresistible fury. ... Such scenes point out the infinite majesty of the Almighty, whom wind and seas obey, 'He ... breathes in every wind; thunders in every storm; wings the lightning;' ... Every Christian must consider the mighty God who sends the storms and tempests, is his God; ... The sinner may take warning by these things. ... All the dispensations of his judgments in the world point to the awful day that is coming on the wicked, and on all that forget God.

‘Aldersgate’ Magazine (1900:700) relates the turning-point in the persecution at Andover, following a Sunday in 1845, interesting also as being urban, not rural:

the faithful ones were again found engaged in worship in front of the Town Hall. Beyond was a still greater crowd drawn up in semi-circular array, with the obvious intention of persecuting. As the service proceeded, a hurricane of wind came on, bringing down with a clatter some boards stacked underneath the Town Hall. Then gathering up the dust on either side of the building, it was whirled round and round in the open space, and thrown, as it were, in the faces of the persecutors with such severity that many had to turn their heads to avoid its force. The phenomenon made a great impression, being regarded by many as a sign of the displeasure of the Almighty, and indeed it was significant that the hostility was subsequently less pronounced; gradually, indeed, it ceased, and open-air services were held without molestation.

These beliefs would have turned PMs’ minds to such Bible verses as Nahum 1:3, “the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.”

Untimely Death as divine Judgement

The Magazine (1835:30-1) prints a number of instances, supplied by Ride and Bishop, in which sudden or unnatural death is presented as an act of God against persecutors. In Andover, when the preachers and their supporters had been brutally assaulted by a mob of 200 to 300, an influential gentleman who encouraged the persecution shortly afterwards died at his own hand: he shot himself, whether by accident or suicide is not told. In an unnamed Hampshire village, “one of our female preachers” overtook three young men in a wagon, who were abusive. One of them followed her some distance, swearing and threatening abusively. She escaped into a house, and some minutes later the young man returned to his two companions, fell under the wheel of the wagon, and died. In the village of L- two farmers raised a mob which cruelly treated the preacher. One died of smallpox,

the other, “by a retributive providence”, broke his leg and died as a result of the injury. Two people at the village of B- “most profanely and daringly made a mock of the service.” Shortly afterwards one “died in an awful state” and the other, so drunk he had to be taken home in a cart, was killed on the way when the horse ran against a bank and overturned the cart. In an unnamed Hampshire town, a man who hated PMism collected a large quantity of rotten eggs for the rabble to throw at the preacher, but before the eggs were delivered to him, he died a sudden death in his house that evening. Forty-two mockers of the Prophet Elisha (2 Kings 2) mauled by she-bears is only one of several examples that could be given from scripture of such retributive, unnatural and sudden death.

Exorcism

Exorcism of persons, though prominent in the Gospels, does not seem to have been a common act or experience among the early PMs, but it was not unknown. William Clowes gives a report on pages 77-9 of his Journal, published in 1844. It is an undated interruption to the chronological narrative, and relates the case of ‘old Jenny Hall, of Harriseahead’:

occasionally she would curse and swear, and throw herself into the most violent paroxysms. On many occasions it was very dangerous to be in the house with her; ... Her conversation became a compound of blasphemy and uncleanness, ... and in the periods of her violence they had to bind her down to the bed with chains. ...

Daniel Shubotham sent me a message to my residence at Tunstall to come up to Harriseahead, and see if by united faith and prayer the woman could be delivered from the powers of darkness. ... Four of us ... accordingly went ... The struggle was great, but our united confidence took hold on God, and the Divine power descended in a mighty stream upon us all. ... her body appeared singularly convulsed, as if some internal power was rending her in pieces; her face was absolutely black, her throat rattled, and she foamed at the mouth, ... Then one began to adjure the devil in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to come out of the woman; immediately there was a sudden alteration, - her deliverance came, ...

About eighteen years subsequent to this event ... I visited Jenny Hall, and found her living in the same place, happy in the Lord, and shouting glory.

Bodily Healing

Physical healing is not a phenomenon discovered frequently in this research. Nonetheless, it was not wholly unknown. Dorricott's biography of William Peacefull (34-5) records "an unusual answer to prayer" at Crookham Common, some five miles from Newbury. The person prayed for was an invalid of some years, who had injured his back whilst removing the root of a large tree, and required two hours to walk a mile with the aid of sticks. All attempts to find medical help had failed, and he grew continually worse. When the PMs came to the Common, he "sought the Lord with a penitent heart, and found him to the joy of his soul." Rising to his feet, he said to the people, "If you will agree to pray for my poor body, the Saviour can as easily heal that. The people "began to wrestle mightily with God in prayer" and the man was able to put aside his crutches and walk home. Subsequently he could walk 30 miles a day, grew mighty in faith and prayer, worked earnestly among the PMs, and was a blessing in the neighbourhood. "For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, 'Arise and walk?'" (Matthew 9:5).

Antliff (1892:299) records Hugh Bourne's conversation in the Mitcheldever Circuit when visiting William Harvey in the winter of 1843-4: "I should have left the world in '38 if James Bourne had not prayed me back again." Harvey explains, "He believed his life was lengthened in answer to the prayers of his brother James."

Poltergeist

Dorricott (1878:38-41) records the laying a ghost. Peacefull was on his way to preach in a distant village, and feeling weary called at a house to ask to rest a while. The residents were a blacksmith and his wife; the wife, "a clean, respectable woman," answered the door, and invited Peacefull in. She had a pale, saddened face and listened silently as Peacefull spoke the Gospel to her. She invited him to join her and her husband for dinner, but said they could not accommodate him overnight. He persisted in the request, and when her husband came in from work, he said they would manage. The smith went to the service with Peacefull, and they returned together. Peacefull read a portion of scripture to them before bed, and prayed, but was taken aback by the strangeness of his own prayer, for he found himself asking that they might be delivered from fear of witches, ghosts, apparitions and superstitious bondage. Despite his embarrassment at the unusual character of his prayer, he noticed that they were both "bathed in tears". The next morning, the wife told him they had not had

such a night's rest for many months, and they felt sure the Lord had sent him to them. Knocking and rapping had frequently been heard outside the house, and, believing it to be haunted, they were too terrified to sleep. Peacefull advised them to pray every night before retiring and to read Numbers 23:23 ("Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!"). About a month later, he visited them again, and was told they had experienced no further disturbances. They both joined the class, and the smith became a class leader and local preacher.

Two other ways in which the PMs' vivid awareness of the spiritual world resonated with folk religion, and which emerge in this research regarding Hampshire, are belief in a personal devil, and in the possibility of occasional divinely permitted contact with the dead in Christ. The former is ubiquitous in their writings; the latter rare. The Devil is mentioned so frequently in the hymns and writings that he needs no citation here to establish their belief in him. He is seen as personal, malicious, and at relentless enmity against God and God's servants, opposing them by inward temptation and outward, often violent, opposition.

Russell (1886) offers the speculation that the voice Ride's widow heard and the touch she felt were those of her late husband. The article, quoting Tennyson, asks whether they were:

*the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.*

These phenomena were not engineered, or allowed to take precedence over the preaching of forgiveness and regeneration. Preachers might even be surprised at their occurrence, but accepted them as acts of God. As discussed further in 6B, PMism was not sensationalist, but neither did it move towards deism. It was a faith in a freely active God whom they believed to be in every sense the Lord. It offered a filial relationship with a God who speaks to his children, and intervenes actively in guidance, blessing and protection in their circumstances, in ways paralleled in the scriptures on which they sought to base their beliefs. It invited its hearers into a more intimate and relevant faith than either the remoter, formal religion of Anglicanism or (if White (1881)'s portrayal is accurate) the dour worship of Calvinist Dissenters.

Academic Comment

Some aspects of folk superstition, such as astrology, cannot be derived from a biblical metanarrative and do not form part of PM practice; they need not come into this discussion, which focuses only on those features which were (or are) common to both.

Obelkevich, Watts, Garratt

Obelkevich (1976:261-3) defines popular religion as “the non-institutional religious beliefs and practices, including unorthodox conceptions of Christian doctrines and ritual, prevalent in the lower ranks of rural society.” It was, he says, rejected by the educated classes and rife among the poor. In a section entitled “Superstition: Christian” he notes (pages 276-7) that popular religion often added a third rôle to that of pastor and gentleman-cum-magistrate to the clergyman’s work, namely wielder of power over the pagan world of spirits. “It was believed that the most effective way of dealing with haunted houses or with satanic possession was to summon a “church clergyman with a Bible”.”

Still under the title *Superstition: Christian* he has a section relating to the Devil, who “was still a living presence in the villages. ... he served to embody the vices and desires of the individuals who confronted him; ... If, as Feuerbach said, men projected their virtues on God, he might have added that they projected their vices on the Devil.” “When the Devil swooped in to carry some poor sinner off to hell, his role was unambiguously evil.”

He writes (pages 300-1) that “the labourers were the chief bearers of superstition. ... Within this class the most superstitious group appears to have been the farm and domestic servants,” and describes Methodists as closer to “the mythologized outlook that had prevailed in early Christian centuries.” Pagan survivals listed by Obelkevich include belief in God, angels, Satan, heaven, hell, miracles, witchcraft, supernatural forces and phenomena, *post mortem* visits, ghosts, the gift of sight, dreams, and portents of death. He explains that the Established Church was too closely associated with élite culture, and preached a god who was too remote, to attract most villagers. He says (pages 231-2), “Primitive Methodists affirmed unhesitatingly the objective existence of supernatural phenomena - God, angels, Satan, heaven, hell, miracles.” They believed, he adds, that witches, Satan and disembodied spirits intervened in human life, beliefs which were “embedded in village culture”, and “Primitive Methodism accommodated them [the beliefs] more easily than any other organized religious group.”

Watts (1995:100-10) offers a similar critique. He confirms that “there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that Evangelical Nonconformity flourished in communities in which superstitious beliefs were particularly prevalent” and that, concerning “Methodism and Dissent”, “Both the teachings of the established church and beliefs inherited from pre-Christian paganism reinforced a frame of mind which accepted the supernatural as normal and which predisposed their followers to accept the Evangelical beliefs in sin, judgement, instantaneous conversion, and heaven and hell.” He writes: “The Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian movements both originated in communities in which supernatural beliefs were widely held. ... To men and women who had always believed in the power of witches and the appearance of ghosts, the daily interventions of an all-seeing God were easily credible.”

Watts’ discussion unfolds (pages 100-10) in a section entitled *The pretended ‘Power of laying Ghosts’: the Conditions of Expansion*. The word *pretended*, excluded from the inverted commas, betrays the direction in which Watts proposes to move his readers’ perception. He writes of Nonconformity “in its most unsophisticated form,” which he contrasts with “the humane, civilized and sophisticated versions of Christianity offered by the Unitarians and Quakers”. The beliefs to which he refers include “widespread belief in a devil who ‘intermeddled in the affairs of men’” and ghosts. He writes: “At its worst the idea that God was constantly intervening in human affairs led Christians to pass facile judgements for party purposes on those who suffered misfortune. ... The belief in divine providence thus provided an explanation for natural and personal disasters that was hardly more rational than the Cornish miner’s belief in ‘knackers’.” (Knackers were the spirits of Jews who were believed to have worked in the mines in Roman times.)

Garratt (2002:211) is similar. Cloy chapel, opened in 1832 in Prees Green Circuit, was the first in North Wales. Hugh Bourne preached there in 1833, and the area has been described as a cradle of PMism. In 1830¹⁶² a wealthy farmer opposed the work by standing at the gate leading to the preaching house, swearing and disturbing the people, at other times raising a mob to make a great noise, by beating pans, hooting and other means. Finally, he wrote to the owners of the house where meetings were held to try to get them evicted. He was found dead one Sunday morning: as the *Memoir* expresses it, “During the night the messenger came, and without further warning he was called to give up his stewardship. ‘I will fight against them that fight against thee.’” Garratt

162 *Memoir of the Life and Labours of J. Wedgwood* (Anon., London, UK. 1870:97)

dismissively comments, “As an example of the classic didactic tale regularly presented in nineteenth-century Primitive Methodist literature, the hand of God is seen to have been at work.”

The present dissertation confirms the factual assertions of Obelkevich, Watts and Garratt, but challenges their assumptions and perspective, which evince an unverifiable theoretical hinterland. Their turns of phrase in several places betray prejudice against these overlapping beliefs, arising from a rationalist, humanist perspective of the Enlightenment. For example, it is usually only bad things that are “rife”. Obelkevich writes as if, in reality, houses and individuals do not sometimes need to be exorcised, as if the Devil does not exist, being a projection of people’s vices and desires, as if miracles do not occur, and as if sinners are not swooped upon and cast into hell (though he fails to mention that in biblical theology it is God, not Satan, who casts them there). Watts contrasts PMism with “humane, civilized and sophisticated” creeds, and dismisses it as not “rational”. Garratt writes as if it is certain that the Cloy farmer’s sudden death was an example, not of divine judgement, but of a “classic didactic tale regularly presented”.

In contrast, this thesis argues that there exists no means of knowing whether the PMs beliefs accord with objective reality or not. Such scholars write as if the PMs’ interpretation, namely, that God intervenes on their behalf, is erroneous, whilst their own philosophical assumptions, namely that these beliefs are outmoded and discredited, are justified. In fact, there is no autonomous, objective, external standard by which either view can be verified. Each is enclosed within a circle of faith or interpretation, and is valid within it. These scholars’ manner of writing leads readers towards their own presuppositions, which cannot be theoretically legitimated, for it is as possible that a providential deity intervened for the PMs as that the belief is mendacious.

The flaw, or fault line, within the critique offered by these scholars is revealed by Watts’s use of the word *rational*. The PMs’ perspective is a hermetically closed context not susceptible to external legitimation, an insight which resonates with Anselm’s dicta *credo ut intelligam* and *fides quaerens intellectum*, and in turn leads back to Augustine of Hippo. It also accords with the dominical assertion, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”¹⁶³. The kingdom is seen only from within. The Methodists’ belief in divine intervention is legitimated within their interpretative framework as surely as Obelkevich’s, Watts’s and Garratt’s may be within theirs, for their epistemology likewise lacks, and must lack, objective validation, being itself an appeal to faith in a different metanarrative of naturalistic rationality. It cannot be established by philosophy, logic

163 John 3:3

or science whether the events related above resulted from divine intervention or not; it is unknowable. Yet these scholars write as if it is indeed knowable, as if it must be acknowledged that they did not result from such intervention. They write as if their context can be “seen” and accepted from outside: the current dissertation challenges this and contributes the thesis that the PMs’ perspective, legitimate within its own interpretative framework, is not subject to independent refutation. This would seem to concur with the theories, or insights, of Jean-François Lyotard.

Hatcher, Johnson, Ambler, Bebbington

Other writers identify the same overlap of belief but do not overtly imply their falsehood. Hatcher (1993:515-41) observes accounts of the supernatural in the early issues of the Magazine in the Hull Circuit’s sphere of influence, and instances dreams, voices, noises, *post mortem* appearance, second sight [which perhaps means what St Paul calls “the word of knowledge”], belief in the Devil, healing, providential intervention in judgement, guidance or deliverance, ghosts, and exorcism. During the 1820s (he adds) the Wesleyan Magazine ceased to relate such events. University training created a distance between Anglican clergy and superstitious rural parishioners. The social élite were sceptical. He sees the identification of the PM preachers with the Filey folk-lore as a key factor in PM success.

Johnson (1989:35-6) comments:

In this fundamentalist world, unshackled by the educated rationalism of the Enlightenment, ‘heaven and angels remained just above the sky, thunder was the voice of God, and Satan could be encountered in darkness and storm’. ... However, unless it be understood how implicitly these things were believed in at the time, then the power of the appeal of Primitive Methodism, and its use of judgements, spirits, warnings and visions cannot be fully comprehended.

Ambler (1989:51) writes that “it was the ability of the Primitive Methodists to link their teachings to popular beliefs which cemented their relationship with the working classes,” and that popular beliefs “became less central to the lives of all except the working classes.” Earlier (1984:243-50) he wrote of:

belief in direct personal revelations, the interference of angels in the affairs of men, and an emphasis on the importance of dreams and visions. ... God spoke, for example, through

thunder, ... Primitive Methodist preachers, struggling for the salvation of individual souls, met and overcame what they saw as personal manifestations of the devil.

Ambler left the door open for an emic reading of the facts, and admitted his readers into a feel or taste of the PMs' inner world.

Bebbington (2012:119) does the same. After exemplifying PM belief in Weardale in the power of Satan, unusual healings, and potent dreams, he writes:

This body of evidence may not be an indication that Primitive Methodists were more credulous than their contemporaries, but it does show that their own views meshed closely with the inherited assumptions of their neighbours. The conventions of Methodists did not automatically transfer them into a modern, rational world shorn of its traditional mysteries.

Folk religion and PMism both postulated supernatural intervention in daily life, which was one of many factors which made PMism attractive to the rural population.

B: EMOTION

For when grace comes in such power it makes the body sway back and forth in ecstasy, much like that of a man who is drunk and cannot steady himself. In such a case the body may even fall down, unable to bear it.

Nevertheless this force is so mighty within that it strikes out into the body, so that all the body may quake and tremble.

- Walter Hilton

The alleged excessive emotionalism of early Methodism has attracted much contempt and ridicule, not least in the scholarly writing of Kent (1978) or the fiction of Arnold Bennett (*Anna of the Five Towns* in Chapter 5: *The Revival* (1902)). The primary sources for this thesis, and the historical narrative of Chapter 5, supply ample instances of strong emotions which came over individuals and congregations. This chapter argues that this was no artificially worked-up emotionalism, but deep and genuine experience sufficiently radical to alter lastingly a person's world-view, way of life, and death.

The Phenomena

The quotation above comes from Hilton's *Ladder of Perfection*, written about 1380¹⁶⁴: such phenomena were not peculiar to Methodism, which, both in the age of Wesley and among the PMs, produced highly charged emotional responses, sometimes accompanied with physical reactions. A few examples are appropriate. Allusion was made in Chapter 5B to a lovefeast at Shefford in August, 1830. Here is Thomas Russell (2005:12):

During the service the power of God brought me to the floor, so that there was no preaching that night. The leader, a very strong man, fell like a log of wood by my side, and there was a great shout in the camp. I lay about two hours under the power of God

164 Jeffrey, David L. (translator) *The Law of Love: English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1988:98)

and two pages later: “While singing this hymn a man wept much, and fell down under conviction: and this was followed up by several more getting a deep concern, and they began to cry for mercy. Some found peace...” and on page 26: “And as I stood on the bankside preaching with all my energy, I perceived an uncommon emotion run through the assembly. Several cried for mercy, and many wept.”

Here he is recounting his wife’s ministry (page 203): “August 22, 1830, His glory was visibly seen and powerfully felt by many. But some jumped out at the windows, and others fled through the doors.”

Vickers (1987:258): “the preaching of the ‘Ranters’ was emotionally highly charged and often aroused a fervent response.” Hatcher (1993:347) describes early PM worship as “corybantic, deeply emotional.” Bebbington (2012:9) writes: “The Methodist revival style often encouraged uninhibited self-expression.” Lysons (2001:67-8):

Conversion was often accompanied by an intense conviction of sin, horrific dreams or visions and crying out for mercy followed by a strong emotion of release or deliverance accompanied by an overwhelming sense of peace and joy. ... ‘Noisy times’ when the power of the Spirit fell were a common feature of early Primitive Methodist worship. ... hearers were moved to become participants by such ejaculations as ‘Glory!’ or ‘Praise the Lord!’ ... charismatic manifestations such as falling down, groaning, uncontrollable laughter and speaking in tongues were often present in the early camp meetings and especially the cottage meetings ... noise and emotionalism was often a characteristic of Primitive Methodist worship in many areas.

Neither this research nor wider reading on early Methodism confirms Lysons reference to speaking in tongues; otherwise his description accords with current findings. Also absent from Hampshire, as far as this research has discovered, are reports, frequent in the Shropshire-based work, of being “caught into vision”, such as this extract from the Journal of John Walford of Prees Green Circuit (Magazine 1830:68-70):

1st May spoke at Lightwood Green. Several shook and trembled under the word. ... fourteen were brought to the ground, two got liberty, several received entire sanctification, and three were caught into vision.

Sunday 4th May Camp meeting at Prees Heath. The work broke out in all directions, ... In the course of the day, many received the blessing of entire sanctification, several conversions took place, and some were in vision.

Censure: fiction

One source on which this thesis draws for common perceptions of PMs is novels by writers whose lives overlapped with the period studied. Cunningham (1975:62-3) writes: “Victorian novels tend to stress only certain aspects, at the expense of presenting Dissent as a diversity of phenomena. Wild preachers, hectic worship, and revivalism ... bellowing, and enthusiastic extravagances.” Anthony Trollope (1815-82) in Chapter 1 of *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870) paints a not unrelated picture: “Mr. Puddleham is an earnest man, who, in spite of the intensity of his ignorance, is efficacious among the poor.” Puddleham was the PM minister. Although efficacious among the poor, he is a man of intense ignorance, thus one whose religion was not such as to appeal to the rational intellect. The landlord in Chapter II of George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* says: “But I’ve heared as there’s no holding these Methodisses when the maggit’s once got i’ their head: many of ’em goes stark starin’ mad wi’ their religion.”

Censure: non-fiction

Bebbington (2012:107) comments:

If a picture of total spontaneity is painted by some commentators on revival, it is even more common for awakenings to be portrayed as episodes of mindless fanaticism. Revivals among Methodists, who tended to be more exuberant than their contemporaries, have been seen particularly often in this way.

He goes on to refer to Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* which, he says, “has done a great deal to spread an image of Methodist revivalists as religious zealots, wildly indulging in self-indulgent fervour.”

Kent (1978:47-8) claims to have a clearer understanding of the ministry of Wesley and his associates than Wesley himself. Wesley’s Journal of May 1759 quotes an eyewitness account, some six pages in length, of a service at Everton in which “poor sinners felt the sentence of death in their souls, and

what sounds of distress did I hear! The greatest number of them who cried or fell, were men.” Kent ascribes their responses to the preaching to “dissociative behaviour,” adding: “Neither Berridge nor Wesley understood what was happening.” He points out that for Wesley the response was “identified with supernatural intervention”: that is, Wesley mistakenly believed it was due to God’s work. It is by no means clear what Kent means by “dissociative behaviour”, which denotes separation from reality, and can be as mild as commonplace daydreaming, or associated with severe psychiatric disorders. Sheard (1980:593, 600), writing of lovefeasts, seems to be quoting Kent, though he does not cite a reference:

reaching a point where a number were overwhelmed by their emotion, possibly gripped in a form of dissociative hysteria - though the early Primitive Methodists were no more able to recognise the symptoms than Wesley before them. ... a form of collective hysteria ... effective in attaining the emotional arousal which they associated with ‘the power descending’.

Whilst some people consciously employ dissociative behaviour as a calming device, and whilst in others it is a temporary defence amidst traumatic experiences, in others it seriously disrupts their work or social relationships. It is by no means clear that the Methodists’ experiences in revival had these deleterious effects, and indeed Methodism seems to have made many into more diligent and reliable workers and to have included a wholesome social nexus of rich and sustaining relationships: witness Leach’s letter to Sir Thomas Baring (Chapter 5D) which observes that the PM’s religion did not excite idleness or disaffection with the duties of servants to masters, and commended “the poor ill used Ranters who ... rush forward from their Ploughs and daily Labour” to their Christian service. Magazine (1894:470) says of Hampshire preacher Jane née Woolford, born 1815: “Religion with her was not *mere emotion*, feeling, or sentiment, but it was a life and force practically exemplified in her whole conduct and deportment.” Allowing for the eulogising character of obituaries, it is still possible to see this as a fair assessment of many of the first generation PMs.

Nor is it clear that even the experience of being “caught into vision” deserves the pejorative disrelish with which Kent writes: if believers emerged invigorated and joyful, who is to say it was a hysterical disorder? Kent discounts the PMs’ interpretation of their experiences as divine work operative among them, and writes from a perspective of rationalist presupposition as his metanarrative, which (as argued in §A) cannot be legitimated by validation based on an autonomous standard of objective truth against the perspective of the original participants.

Here is Jefferies (1892:104) :

In summer this preacher will mount upon a wagon placed in a field by the roadside, and draw a large audience, chiefly women, who loudly respond and groan and mutter after the most approved manner. ... The exhibitions of emotion on the part of the women at such meetings and in the services in their cottages are not pleasant to listen to, but the impression left on the mind is that they are in earnest.

Thompson (1968:417-8) refers to “the hysterical aspect of Methodist and Baptist revivalism, ... The methods of the revivalist preachers were noted for their emotional violence”. In like manner, Hobsbawm (1959:132) states that such religion was almost totally untheological, unintellectual and emotional.

Challenging the Obloquy

It is often asserted that conversion narratives are stereotyped, falling into a set pattern of discourse which is at variance with reality: converts professing to have lived as vile sinners prior to coming to faith, when in reality they were guilty only of insignificant peccadilloes; that the narratives exaggerate both the depth of their sin and the magnitude of the changes wrought within them. Garratt (2002:211) was quoted earlier on “the classic didactic tale regularly presented.” Truss writing in Chapter 4 of conversion and discipleship, expresses this well:

There was a conventional language for describing these events, common to the Primitive Methodist Magazine, contemporary evidence and later-nineteenth-century hagiography ... Oxtoby was illiterate, as were the majority of his converts, so it was inevitable that their lively and life-affirming experiences were conveyed in the pietistic terms favoured by their biographers.

But this overlooks the fact that the PMs saw themselves, not in comparison with other people whose lives may well have been outwardly worse than theirs, but in contrast to the purity, character and standards of the God whom they believed they had offended and whom they wished to love.

Moreover, it is hard to sustain the judgement that the method or the effect was mere emotionalism, deliberate or unintended. If emotionalism is the deliberate incitement of emotion and the suppression of reason, the charge is plainly wrong in the case of the forensic, analytical preaching of

Wesley, although other preachers were less cerebral in their presentation of the gospel. The preaching was simple, and focused, and if the evangelists attempted to arouse strong emotions, it was because they perceived a strong, radical response to be required for the needy condition of their hearers, not in order to excite feelings for feelings' sake in the short-lived creation of a meeting vibrant with emotion and swept by hysteria.

Journal extracts from fairly late in the heroic period show that the work was sustained over no small time. The sustaining of intense, heightened emotions is difficult if those emotions are not wholesome and deep-seated. It was from Shropshire that Heath came to Brinkworth in 1824; fifteen years later here (Magazine 1840:432ff) is the Journal of Richard Ward for 1839, regarding a village in the Oswestry Circuit:

Friday 8th November. Pontfaen. At the time of preaching the chapel was crowded to excess. A powerful time in preaching, and a wonderful and surprising work in the prayer meeting. How many were converted I cannot tell. Many were weeping, others singing, others praying, others filled with joy, praising God for what he had done for them, others, overwhelmed with the power of God, lay on the floor for a considerable time, and these then rose up, praising the Lord, and exhorting others to seek the Lord. Men, women, and children, are engaged in this great work.

Sunday 10th November. In the morning preached at Pontfaen to a large congregation. Many wept. The Lord visited us.

The preachers themselves were moved by a surging compassion for their fellow men and women, whom they perceived as “sporting on the brink of everlasting woe”, on their way unawares to endless torment and regret in the fire of hell. Their preaching was impassioned, not for the enjoyment of observing the hysteria they might arouse, but from profound concern for the eternal wellbeing of their hearers.

The ethos throughout the expansionist period was of strong, deep and impelling emotion, not any kind of emotionalism, which moved the preachers to sing, believe and mean the words of *Wesley's Hymns* #30, PMHB #33:

*Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin,
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in;
He calls you now, invites you home;
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!*

Nor were their converts moved merely by fear of hell: they came into a penetrating and pervasive sense of the guilty nature of their deeds and characters. They felt deeply stained. Hymns 108-167 in *Wesley's Hymns* form a section entitled *For Mourners convinced of Sin*; in PMHB the section "Mourners" numbers 120-163. Here are stanzas from a hymn of twenty verses in *Wesley's Hymns*, split into two parts (#135-6); in PMHB these are in hymns 131-2:

*Loathsome, and vile, and self-aborred,
I sink beneath my sin;
But, if thou wilt, a gracious word
Of thine can make me clean.*

*Blind from my birth to guilt and thee
And dark I am within;
The love of God I cannot see,
The sinfulness of sin.*

The following section in *Wesley's Hymns* (168-181) is for those who feel they once walked with their Lord but have let their love grow cold and have backslidden. Its first hymn, which is #165 in PMHB in the section entitled "Backsliders", begins:

*Depth of mercy! can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
I have long withstood his grace,
Long provoked him to his face,
Would not hearken to his calls,
Grieved him by a thousand falls.*

Their anguish did not arise only from fear of infernal torment in the unquenchable flames of Gehenna: they were persuaded that their past thoughts, words and deeds were in themselves wrong, having the nature of sin, and they felt this guilt to be an unbearable weight: the remembrance of them was grievous and the burden intolerable.

If the preachers had striven to stir up emotion or hysteria, individual or crowd, for its own sake, the gifted orators among them might have succeeded. This cannot, of course, be demonstrated. Without first-hand observation of the degree of *hwyl* which came upon the preachers, printed sermons fail to convey the necessary impression, but the hymns, journals, testimonies and other material give clear evidence of what was believed and what effects were desired. The firmly held theology of the extant material, studied in Chapter 4A, demonstrates that the religion was not one of emotionalism, but it certainly generated *emotion*. A person closely threatened by *bodily* death, then rescued unexpectedly by the act of another, is likely to experience forceful joy and gratitude; these believed they had been rescued from *eternal* death by the Son of God. Their agony and their bliss were real.

This discussion centres not only on crowds. Here, from Thomas Russell's biography of him¹⁶⁵, is Ride's account of his coming to faith when aged about 21:

Such love, joy, and glory filled my soul that I knew not how better to express my gratitude to God than by taking my hat up from the ground, and throwing it into the air. I shouted, "Glory to God! He has pardoned all my sins!" My father, hearing the noise, came out to see what was the matter, and when he beheld me leaping and shouting, and throwing up my hat, he cried out, "The Methodists have driven my poor boy mad!" But, thank God, I was just come into my right mind.

Background

The hearers lived in a society of unrestrained violence or pleasure, of backswording (a violent sport in which men fought with wooden cudgels), drunkenness, absence of personal religion, extreme poverty, failed political revolution, and despair. It is not surprising that many responded with strong emotion and sometimes physical reaction to the sense of forgiveness, a new way of life, acceptance in a closely-knit society, and the assurance of a place in "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Indeed, it would be more strange if they did not.

¹⁶⁵ page 12

Furthermore, the reactions of men and women to Methodist preaching occurred against a general belief that the Bible is true, even among those who ignored its standards of faith and life. When such belief was pressed home by gifted preachers, strong reaction was evoked.

A further aspect of the background was Romanticism, with its emphasis on emotion over rationality, though to explore this further would lead beyond the present research, especially as it is unlikely that many of the early Hampshire PMs were influenced first-hand by absorbing the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Byron; nonetheless, Romanticism was one component in the ambient *Zeitgeist*.

In assessing the place of emotion in early PMism, the social background should be considered: the poverty, unrest, hunger, degradation, hopelessness described in Chapter 3A set the joy of divine and human acceptance, and the hope of a better resurrection to come, into vivid contrast. It is hardly surprising that the power of the dehumanising hardships should be matched by the power of a surging sense of beatitude.

PM Critique

Here is Thomas Russell, in prison, on page 34 of his autobiography:

“Sir,” I said, “What do you mean by the Ranters?” He said, “Those who shout and bawl, and make a confusion of noise in worship.” I said, “Nay, Sir, ... Primitive Methodists are a very honourable people and sing in harmony, pray in faith, and preach with sense, and are very moral and upright in their conduct.”

The *PM Preacher’s Magazine* (May, 1828:31-2) explains that “when grace descends, a small stream of power may seem to fill those believers whose hearts are as small vessels; and they may fall down under the effects of it. But when God has enlarged their hearts, they may contain a large flow of power without falling down under it. ... If a believer press on, and grow in grace, he will soon be able to bear large flows of grace without that peculiar bodily effect. ... all those effects will subside, and they will grow into the higher degrees of faith.” In other words, as maturity develops, so these manifestations may be expected to decrease. The article warns:

people may be strongly tempted, and may by temptation be induced to begin to put such bodily effects in the place of faith; and in such cases they strive to continue those bodily

effects, whether they be motions or fallings-down, or whatever they may be; and when this is unhappily the case, they become weak. It is therefore the minister's duty to urge them to grow as fully in faith, and as strong in grace as possible; but to endeavour to get beyond the bodily effects as soon as they possibly can. ... But if any person should, after a fair course of time, begin to show an inclination or wish to continue those bodily effects, such person will be likely, in the end, to be no credit to his profession.

Such are not the words of a movement which wishes to induce group hysteria or excite striking shows of emotion; rather, they are discouraged as believers grow in spiritual maturity.

A recurring motif throughout this dissertation is the PMs' desire to align their religion with the Bible, in which they would have read words like, "Thus saith the Lord, ... to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2). Their Bibles supplied many examples of shouts of joy and cries of distress, and even a few of fallings down on the occasion of personal theophanies.

Conclusion

The emotion which was aroused lastingly changed many lives for the better, from drunkenness, violence, irresponsibility, to sobriety, reliability, diligence and kindness. There is a world of difference between a crowd of screaming people listening to Elvis Presley, or to a performance of *The X-Factor*, experiencing a passing excitement which leaves the life unchanged, and the response to focused, searching sermons delivered by PMs in their most powerful meetings. Moreover, their experiences justifiably claim as much validity as second-hand interpretations imposed by theorists whose critique is based, not on participation, but on written accounts.

Finally, it should be noted that these people's faith and experience carried them through appalling tragedies. This thesis gives many examples of loss of parents in childhood, bereavement, serious and persistent ill health, opposition from family, grinding poverty, arduous toil, poor or non-existent accommodation, danger, physical persecution, slander, libel, imprisonment and public mockery, but many emerged with their faith and vocation intact. To all this might be added death faced with a sense of victory and hope. This was no emotionalism or artificial hysteria: it went to the roots of their being.

C: HELL

Another feature of the PM inner world was a compelling consciousness of the fate of those who die without faith in Christ: eternal fire awaits the damned. This section discovers the dislike which this doctrine has evoked, and shows that the distaste is based on two misconceptions: that the doctrine is aberrant, and that the preaching was motivated by relish in the destruction of the wicked, a kind of self-righteous *Schadenfreude*. The section argues that the teaching is not aberrant but consonant with English and Methodist religion over many centuries, searches for the spirit in which PMs preached it, and demonstrates that their motivation has been misrepresented.

Citations are not picked randomly from novels, satire, or polemics, but are chosen to demonstrate that this hostility is spread through many genres and periods of literature. Later PMism moved away from this emphasis, but robust, fervent preaching of it was an essential element in the early decades. As Knight (2008:161) argues in a section entitled “The decline of hell”, one of the processes which contributed to secularisation during the final quarter of the century was the fading away of fear of hell. McLeod (1996:182-5) writing of doctrinal doubt in the late century, believes that “Most important here was the doctrine of hell - the everlasting punishment of the wicked.” OLD states that:

Hell was in classical Christian theology the eternal state after death of the finally impenitent and unbelieving. The traditional teaching was strongly upheld by John and Charles Wesley ... In the 1870s the doctrine, though never discarded, gradually dropped out of normal Methodist preaching. ... In modern Methodism the subject is not often raised...

PM Preaching

Warnings of hell and judgement were a dominant theme in PM preaching. Magazine (1853:590-601), writing of the need to search the scriptures, urges:

You should search the Scriptures because they contain the most alarming threatenings against sin. ... Here we read, ... “The wicked shall be turned into hell... He that being often reproveth, hardeneth his neck, shall be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy ... punished with

eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;” ... Do you desire to avoid the awful punishment here threatened?

Barber (1932) wrote: “There was no half-way house in their theology. In their thought of man’s destiny Heaven and Hell were sharply defined.”

Johnson (1989) discovered the same prominent theme, writing of “the terrifying reality of hell,” “the preacher’s message of repentance and escape from damnation,” and “the use, by local preachers, of the themes of the impending day of judgement, as well as their vivid portraits of hell and damnation ... could bring the roughest man to his knees.”

It was noted in Chapter 4A that in 1845 John Buckland was removed from the Reading Circuit Plan “as he does not believe in eternal punishment.” The teaching was among the doctrines listed in the consolidated minutes, was taken seriously, and figured large in the minds of the early preachers. Their songs did not mince their words in conveying the message. Ritson (1911:167) states that the distinctive note of “the most characteristic hymns of the movement” was the Gospel call, preceded by the arresting command:

*Stop, poor sinner, stop and think,
Before you further go;
Will you sport upon the brink
Of everlasting woe?*

Werner (1984:145-6) states that this was “the initial stanza of a hymn habitually sung in the street by preachers upon entering a new village or town.” Sheard (1980:422) tells how John Hatton of Northwich heard the Ranters singing in the street outside his house and “saw that hell would be his doom, if he did not flee to Christ for pardon.” Watts (1995:51, 72, 78, 81, 172) studied 670 narratives of conversion, of which over a third were PM, and noted that the most important factor inducing men and women to seek salvation was fear, and that the fear mentioned most frequently was of hell: “it was fear of the eternal torments of hell that filled Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational chapels in the first half of the nineteenth century.” He mentions “the unsophisticated hell-fire sermons of the Primitive Methodists.”

Thomas Morgan (1804-48), born near Wistanstow, Shropshire, began his preaching ministry in the Shrewsbury and Hopton Bank Circuits; Shrewsbury, as noted in Chapter 5B, sent Samuel Heath to

Brinkworth. In October 1839¹⁶⁶, at an open-air meeting in a country village, Morgan preached *An Agricultural Sermon* to a large congregation. With many illustrations from farming life, it includes this plea:

Poor lost sinners, on the brink of destruction, here is a portion for you; open your hearts to receive it in: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

...Every moment you put off the work, the day of life shortens! Your sin and guilt increase; your heart hardens ... and you are a stride nearer hell! ... Awake! awake! Oh! my friends, out of this snare of the devil, and flee from the wrath to come; but let it be now! ...

He who died for your sins and rose again for your justification, and who has "all power in heaven and earth," is able to save the greatest sinner amongst you.

The preaching remained intact at the close of the period of this study, as evidenced by the sketch of a sermon on the text "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" ((a) below) in the 1850 Magazine (pages 656-7) and by the peroration the New Year's Address in the 1853 Magazine (page 7) ((b)):

(a) *The duration of it will be eternal - without end. ... How appalling and overwhelming the contemplation! Imagine millions of ages to have rolled away, yet the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. On, on pass the years, ages upon ages, ages upon ages, yet the worm dieth not, the fire is not quenched. Still further on, on - but no. Eternity cannot be compassed; there are no limits, no end; it is still the same, unchanging, for ever and ever - the worm dieth not, the fire is not quenched. ... Flee from the wrath to come! Shelter only is to be found under Calvary's Cross!*

(b) *Have some of my readers never yet turned to God in penitence and faith, and never yet obtained a preparation for the eternal world ...? But ah! thou hast been treasuring up "wrath against the day of wrath." Awful treasure this! ... Oh tremble, lest the cloud of Divine vengeance, which thy sins and thy neglect of Christ and his salvation have swelled, should burst in terrific majesty, and overwhelm thee in irretrievable ruin. Flee! flee from the wrath to come.*

166 Magazine (1840:96-100)

Distaste: Schadenfreude

Hobsbawm and Rudé (1969:249) write about “the hell- and eternity-obsessed village Ranters of the 1830s”. Hobsbawm (1959:131, 136) refers to “the emotional orgies of hell-fire preaching” and says “the tone of their religion was harsh and implacable”; “Unyielding and tragic forms of religion ... forbidding sects ... take to hellfire religion” - a particularly eloquent expression of this repugnance.

Charlotte Brontë’s Jane, in *Jane Eyre* (1847, Chapter 4), says “Of the fanatic’s burning eternity I have no fear: there is not a future state worse than this present one.”

In Charles Kingsley’s novel *Two Years Ago* (1857), Tom says:

You may, however, only believe in the same being in whom the Methodist parson believes, one who intends to hurl into endless agony every human being who has not had a chance of hearing the said preacher’s nostrum for delivering men out of the hands of Him who made them!

Charles Darwin (1809-82) wrote in his *Autobiography*:

I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe ... will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.

Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, *Dead Man’s Rock* (1887), Chapter 1:

my grandfather had led a hot and riotous youth, fearing neither God, man, nor devil. Before his return, however, he had “got religion” from some quarter, and was confirmed in it by the preaching of one Jonathan Wilkins, as I have heard, a Methodist from “up the country,” and a powerful mover of souls. As might have been expected in such a man as my grandfather, this religion was of a joyless and gloomy order, full of anticipations of hell-fire and conviction of the sinfulness of ordinary folk.

This Methodist grandfather, Amos Trenoweth, died in 1837, in the period of this study.

Morris (1967:87) writes disparagingly of PM beliefs about “the fall, human depravity, last things and the eternal punishments of unrepentant sinners.”

Distaste: aberrance

Revulsion at the preaching of this doctrine continues to run through attempts to discredit it on the grounds that it is aberrant, outmoded or at variance with a clearer grasp of Christian truth. Anne Brontë contributes to the public mind's disbelief in it in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848, Chapter 49), putting these words on her heroine Helen's lips:

But thank God I have hope ... from the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass, still, it is not lost, and God, who hateth nothing that He hath made, will bless it in the end!

White (1881:45-6, 68) tells the fictitious but verisimilar story of a Dissenting minister who loses his orthodox faith and characterises the traditional teaching as mere "theories":

Stories are told of sudden conversions, and of course if a poor simple creature can be brought to believe that hell-fire awaits him as the certain penalty of his misdeeds, he will cease to do them; but this is no real conversion, for essentially he remains pretty much the same kind of being that he was before.

I had long since seen the absurdity and impossibility of the ordinary theories of hell and heaven.

Peake, born 1865, wrote of his PM home¹⁶⁷:

The atmosphere in which we lived was that of a rather narrow evangelicalism. ... a very sharp line was drawn between the converted and the unconverted, and the eternal destiny of both classes was regarded as fixed at death. The state of the lost was regarded as inconceivably terrible, a state of hopelessness and unending agony.

He writes further, comparing the early movement with his appointment in 1892 as tutor to train candidates for the ministry¹⁶⁸, that the early preachers

accepted without any shadow of misgiving the current eschatology. The moment of death fixed for ever the fate of the individual. The sharp division between the converted and the unconverted, the sheep and the goats, was not toned down by any mediating devices. The

167 Wilkinson (1971:6)

168 *The Life of Sir William Hartley* (1926 Hodder & Stoughton, London, UK:130-41)

destiny of the unsaved was appalling beyond all conception. Hell was not simply a mental state, it was a place. ... a conservatism so rigid...

That it fell to me to be the pioneer in this respect was more or less accidental; the essential thing was that ... the new light should be suffered to shine. ... It is, of course, well known that there was for a time not a little uneasiness and even resentment in some quarters at the kind of teaching I was giving the students.

Thus, in Peake's revised eschatology, and in a vein similar to White's, the teaching is changed from the earlier perception of it as revealed truth, to having been at the time merely the "current" and therefore dispensable eschatology of a bygone generation, now superseded by new light.

Davies (1963:94) writes: "The popular image of an evangelist, and still more of a revivalist, is of a man with a crude, ill-thought-out, hell-fire theology, who alternately wheedles and terrifies his hearers into accepting his message; the theology he is thought to have taken over ready-made from some literalist interpreter of the Bible". The teaching, Davies would have his readers believe, is wrong, being crude and ill-thought-out.

Lysons (2001:109), writing of "a typical Primitive Methodist circuit", mentions "the popular belief that a person's destiny is determined at the moment of death." He argues that, "The need for an intermediate state between death and the Final Judgement in which the soul might move from the near-annihilation of sin to the closest union with God is met by the doctrine of Purgatory," adding that "the doctrine received little consideration in Primitive Methodist circles." He regrets the lack of "any understanding of the theories of conditional immortality and universalism" (pages 160-1).

Orthodoxy

Methodism

It is appropriate to be certain about what Methodists believe on these dogmas, and thereby to demonstrate that the PMs were promoting no novelty of their own devising. Here is the beginning of the third section of Wesley's sermon entitled *The Great Assize*, preached at the assizes held before the Hon. Sir Edward Clive on 10th March 1758:

We may, in the third place, consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgment. And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good: "These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." It should be observed, it is the very same word^[169] which is used, both in the former and in the latter clause. It follows, that either the punishment lasts for ever, or the reward too will come to an end; - no, never, unless God could come to an end, or his mercy and truth could fail. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,"...

The wicked, meantime, shall be turned into hell, even all the people that forget God. They will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." They will be "cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone," originally "prepared for the devil and his angels;" where they will gnaw their tongues for anguish and pain; they will curse God and look upward. ... For "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

The teaching is found also in his Journal. On 16th May, 1774, he recorded:

In the afternoon, as also at seven in the morning, I preached in the kirk at Port-Glasgow. My subjects were Death and Judgment, and I spoke as home¹⁷⁰ as I possibly could.

Here are some words from Charles Wesley's sermon preached before the University of Oxford on 4th April, 1742, regarding "the natural state of man":

He says, "Peace! Peace!" while the devil, as "a strong, man armed," is in full possession of his soul. He sleeps on still and takes his rest, though hell is moved from beneath to meet him; though the pit from whence there is no return hath opened its mouth to swallow him up. A fire is kindled around him, yet he knoweth it not; yea, it burns him, yet he lays it not to heart.

"The pit from whence there is no return": this is the warning which Methodists preached from the beginning. No Methodist can fault it, nor deem it aberrant.

169 αἰώνιον

170 home - plainly and to the point (Shorter OED)

Anglicanism

The preaching of hell and judgement has held a lasting place within English religious life, as demonstrated by Knight's 2012 study of Anglican country and village sermons in the period 1804-1906. Describing a spectrum of preaching that ranged from biblical exposition to moral exhortation, Knight explains¹⁷¹: "Those at the 'moral exhortation' end spend much of their sermons issuing warnings about the eternal fate of the lost, and urging their hearers and readers to repentance, faith, and good behaviour."

An example follows on the next two pages. Edward Berens (ca 1777-1859), Archdeacon of Berkshire from 1832 to 1855, a graduate of Oriel College, Oxford, had earlier been vicar of Shrivenham, a village missioned from the Shefford PM Circuit. Knight tells us that he produced six volumes of sermons in the period 1820-1852. Knight comments on Berens' *Twenty-six Village Sermons* (1836):

His sermons warned repeatedly of the danger of hell and of being only interested in religion when ill or facing death. ... The sermons have been arranged in a way which would make them a logical sequence for a reader in search of a course of instruction on how to be saved. Berens's thesis was simple: 'This change, - or conversion, - ...is absolutely necessary in order to our being received into Heaven; and consequently, since there is no middle state, it is absolutely necessary in order to our escaping the punishment of Hell.'

Knight adduces further proof of this theme in Anglican preaching of the period from the writings of William Gresley, graduate of Christ Church, Oxford, ordained in 1825. In his *Treatise on the Art of Preaching* (1835), he writes:¹⁷²: "The chain of topics is briefly this - we are by nature under God's wrath; how can we escape? Only through the atonement made by our Redeemer."

It is clear from Knight's study of 150 volumes of village and country sermons that Methodists were by no means alone in enforcing this doctrine and warning their audiences. Nor was the teaching a novelty. Many of the Anglican enemies of PMism frequently acknowledged the Patristic orthodoxy of the doctrine at Morning Prayer, for the Book of Common Prayer begins the service for stated days with the *Quicumque vult*, requiring faith in the Athanasian Creed and Catholick Faith, "Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled: without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." No Anglican can fault PM teaching on this dogma.

¹⁷¹ page 72

¹⁷² Knight (2012:75-6)

Earlier English Christianity

As far back as English preaching can be traced, Hell is a strong theme. Here is Ælfric, first abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Eynsham, writing, in about 990AD, a sermon to be preached in the churches on Shrove Tuesday:

Crist cwæð on sumere stowe, þæt “Se weig ... is swiðe rum and smeðe, seðe læt to helle-wite” ... forði þe unlustas gebringað þone man to forwyrde. ... to ecum tintregum, buton he ær his ende yfeles geswice and god wyrce.

[Christ said in some place that “The way is very wide and smooth that leads to the punishment of hell” because evil desires bring the man to destruction, to everlasting torments, unless before his end he ceases from evil and works good.¹⁷³]

Henry Soames, sometime Chancellor of St Paul’s Cathedral, London, wrote this appreciation of Ælfric: “While England bled at every pore, an admirable genius laboured indefatigably to lighten her distress, by furnishing a rich supply of sound instruction ... a stream of healing knowledge, to mend and comfort evil times.”¹⁷⁴ The phrase “a rich supply of sound instruction” should be noted in this discussion.

In the century after Ælfric’s Shrove Tuesday sermon, in about 1014, one of the most famous of English sermons was preached by Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, entitled, by a pun on his name, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Its final sentence (other than “God ure helpe, amen.”) begins thus:

And uton gelome understandan þone micclan dom þe we ealle to sculon, and beorgan us georne wið þone weallandan bryne helle wites...

[And let us diligently understand the great judgement to which we all must go and guard ourselves against that seething conflagration of the torment of hell...¹⁷⁵]

Anselm was Archbishop of Canterbury 1093-1109. In his *Meditation On the Terror of Judgment*¹⁷⁶, he writes:

Oh anguish! on one side will be sins accusing, on the other justice terrifying: beneath, the fearful chaos of hell gaping; above, the Judge angry; ... Who shall deliver me from the hand of

173 My translation

174 *The Anglo-Saxon Church* London, UK: Parker, 1861

175 My translation

176 1856:29-30. Oxford, UK: Parker

GOD? ... Who is called Saviour, that I may call upon His Name? Yes it is He, it is He Himself, JESUS. ... Breathe again then, O sinner, breathe again, despair not, hope in Him, Whom thou fearest. ... For what profit is there to Thee in my blood if I go down to everlasting corruption?

William Langland (ca 1332-ca 1386) and Geoffrey Chaucer (ca 1343-1400) shed light on later mediæval preaching. Little is known about Langland, and information here is taken from *Piers the Ploughman: a new Translation by J. F. Goodridge*¹⁷⁷. Langland was a cleric, probably educated at the monastery of Great Malvern, undergoing the usual training for the priesthood. A large number of manuscripts of *Piers the Ploughman* have survived, suggesting that it was widely appreciated in Langland's lifetime and throughout the following century. Here, in Goodridge's translation, are some lines from Book V in which Reason preaches:

'Your pears and plum-trees toppled before the blast,' he said, '...beeches and mighty oaks were dashed to the ground, with their roots twisted high in the air, as a terrible sign of the destruction that deadly sin will bring upon you all, on the Day of Doom.'

A few pages later, Piers the Ploughman speaks:

From there you will see a mansion as bright as the sun, surrounded by a moat of Mercy, ... It has battlements of Christendom to save mankind, and is buttressed with Believe-or-you-cannot-be-saved. ... it is very hard for you to get in at all, except by the special mercy of God.

These warnings are solemn and strong. The Day of Judgement, the destruction of sinners, the need for faith and for God's mercy: the themes are all here in this preaching some 840 to 470 years before PMism came to Hampshire.

Chaucer was encouraged as court poet by Richard II. His work contains much adverse criticism of the church of his day, but also offers his readers *The Parson's Tale*, a sermon on the theme of Penitence. The parson is an exception to Chaucer's generally disapproving view of church officials:

*A good man was ther of religioun....
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
His parissshens devoutly wolde he teche,
Benygne he was, and wonder diligent.*¹⁷⁸

177 Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Classics, 1959, pages 99-100, 117-8

178 *Canterbury Tales*, lines 477-484

What this good, benign priest taught with such diligence to his parishioners concerned “the causes that oghte moeve a man to Contricioun” the third being “drede of the day of doom and of the horrible peynes of helle.” The following pages contain these words:

- the horrible pit of helle open
- al the sorwe that a man myghte make fro the bigynnyng of the world nys but a litel thyng at regard of the sorwe of helle.
- the fyr that evere shal brenne
- they shulle be naked in body as of clothing, save the fyr in which they brenne
- it peyneth hem evere, as though they sholde dye anon; but certes, they shal nat dye. ... and they shul desiren to dye, and deeth shal flee fro hem.
- ther shal horroure and grisly drede dwellen withouten ende.

“Naked except for the fire in which they burn, horror and grisly dread without end”: no Methodist preaching was more vivid than this from an abbot, two archbishops, a little-known priest, and a court poet, for judgement and hell have been taught by the ancient and mediæval English church, Anglicans, the Wesleys, and the PMs. The teaching cannot be opposed on the ground of novelty or aberrance.

PM Motivation

In the sermon already quoted on eternal punishment (Magazine 1850:656-7), the preacher asks:

Is it a marvel, in view of such a doom, that the Son of God ... wept over the impending fate of the ungodly? that he sweat great drops of agony? ... pouring out his blood and his soul together, that a way of escape might be effected?

The PM preachers believed they were motivated by the same love and compassion. Ride wrote¹⁷⁹: “Such was the grief I felt for souls that I thought I could endure any sufferings for their salvation. ... And truly the burden of souls was laid deeply upon my heart.” Russell (1869:10, 13) records: “Soon after obtaining salvation I felt a strong desire for the good of others ... and in many instances I with others saw precious souls saved: these things were cheering. ... I preached from ‘Remember Lot’s wife.’ I felt a weighty sense of responsibility as I looked over the many hundreds who were

179 quoted in Russell (1886:12-3)

present.” Elizabeth Smith wrote in a letter of January 1827: “Precious souls have been brought out of darkness into light” and in a letter of August 1831: “I never felt so willing to suffer as I do now. There is good done in Hampshire” (Russell 1869:183, 209).

Again this is consonant with Shropshire. In *Early Recollection of Mr. William Doughty, and of Primitive Methodism in Oswestry*, Thomas Minshall relates that Doughty was sentenced in 1823 to one month in Shrewsbury jail after preaching in the street. Doughty wrote to one who sent him provisions in jail: “I feel at this time a love to every soul of man; even my enemies if I have any.” Minister John Waplington of Oswestry Circuit reported: “On January 1st 1850, I was again appointed for Tallen-green; and beheld six fresh penitents obtain redemption. ... My soul thirsts for the salvation of precious souls” (Magazine 1850:115).

Pritchard (1867:16-8), in Jukes’s biography, writes concerning the early local preachers: “Love for the souls of perishing men and zeal for the glory of God ... have constrained and sustained many a Methodist local preacher to do such work for the space of forty years with pleasure and satisfaction.”

The message that Methodists brought is that God’s will is for salvation not judgement. If the message is rejected, God’s offer is thwarted. Methodists sang:

*O for a trumpet voice
On all the world to call!
To bid their hearts rejoice
In him who died for all;
For all my Lord was crucified,
For all, for all my Saviour died!*

- PMHB #37

- *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780; 1876 #34)

Knight (2008:146), writing of revival preachers, succinctly summarises their inner compulsion: “They believed that they were literally saving souls from hell and eternal damnation.”

Conclusion

This section of the chapter has demonstrated that the idea of judgement and eternal punishment is treated as worthy of ridicule or revulsion, but it is orthodox Wesleyan, Anglican, mediæval and Patristic teaching. Disbelief and revulsion concerning it are at variance with the orthodoxy of English Christianity from the time of Ælfric to the time of the Victorian clergy and squires who sought to silence the PM preachers. This section has argued that once the PM viewpoint is understood, that men and women around them were in dire danger of passing from life into the fires of hell with no possibility of *post mortem* recovery, their pressing home of this peril may be seen as healthy, balanced and compassionate, invalidating critics' castigation.

CHAPTER 7:

BALANCING THE HAGIOGRAPHY

Preceding chapters have chronicled and discussed the ‘astonishing achievements’ of the first generation of PMs in northern Hampshire, explored the inner world and ethos of their individual and corporate religion, and engaged with pejorative popular and academic comment on salient aspects of their belief and practice with a view to reaching a more balanced and faithful understanding. This chapter continues the hypothesis that much comment needs to be modified or refuted, but whilst Chapter 6 focused on disapproving critiques, the thesis now turns to admiration, sometimes amounting to hagiography. As Woolley (2013:13) noticed:

The history of Methodism in the nineteenth century was usually written by Methodists and, most frequently, by Methodists of the same stripe as the story being told. This led to selectivity in the treatment of anything that did not reflect favourably on the denomination of the writer.

This chapter asks whether the preachers and members fit common representations, or whether a true assessment of them leads to a modified appreciation of their persons and work. Each section will examine one kind of praise and attempt an assessment of its verisimilitude or conformity to historical facts. Evidence will be provided that, despite its undeniable achievements in Hampshire, early PMism did not wholly equate to the euphoric encomia of its admirers.

The first and second sections suggest that the facts admired are real but praise needs to be balanced with acknowledgement of less superlative features; the third also confirms the facts, but challenges interpretations of the motivation which produced them; the fourth provides evidence that the alleged facts never really happened and suggests that the praise results from the wishful construction of a past PMism congenial to the outlook of certain admirers.

HEROISM

The first two sections consider the adulation with which PM writers portrayed the early pioneers in biographical or historical narratives. The triumphant hero is the image beloved of admirers of Methodist tradition: men and women whom nothing daunted, who strode sublimely and victoriously through the obstacles of life, preached a pure and unsullied gospel, and achieved triumphs which shine with stellar lustre. These two sections will not detract from their achievements, but argue that the players did not wholly match the eulogies, but rather in body, mind and emotion they shared the common frailties, failings and tragedies of mankind, and included a darker strain in their gospel than has sometimes been recognised or acknowledged.

A: HUMAN FRAILTY

The Hagiography

Calder (2012, Chapter 1), writing of such authors as Ritson (1911) and Church (1851), says they “played to a readership’s taste for past heroes who were latter-day disciples suffering for their faith, ... followers and leaders alike mythologised the past.” He comments in Chapter 9:260: “The denomination’s own accounts lay great emphasis on the humble origins of their preachers, but also on their formidable achievements, both practical and theological; and there is no doubt that some people did fit that description very well. It is by no means clear, though, that they were typical.” He argues that this image of heroes from humble backgrounds was largely the creation of Hugh Bourne during his period as editor of the Magazine, 1820-1842, and that subsequent historians have adopted and passed on the mythology implanted in the denomination’s minds. He writes (Chapter 3:70) that “Bourne generated a series of legends that quickly became fact for the followers.”

This hagiography may be exemplified from authors who were contemporary with the characters and events they depict:

- Pritchard 1808-85
- Antliff 1813-84
- Shaw 1830-1903
- Church published in 1851

- Woodcock 1829-1922.
- Doubtless some of the Newbury carollers (1882) witnessed events of 50 years earlier.

The 1853 Magazine (page 75) looks back thus:

And, perhaps, at no period since the days of the Apostles has the simple testimony of the Gospel been more signally owned of God in the revival and extension of scriptural Christianity, than during the last forty years by the Primitive Methodist preachers.

The encomia extend to both itinerant and local preachers. Pritchard (1867:16-8), in Jukes's biography:

It is, indeed, no play of words to call the work of a local preacher labour, as it existed in the very extensive circuits during the early days of our beloved Connexion. ... On Monday morning, towards six or seven o'clock, he would have to swing mallet and chisels across his shoulder, and walk some distance to shape the stubborn stone for its proper place. All this Sabbath toil without money and without price. ... Worthy men! your reward is in heaven! ... The toils of those days, when the connexion's workmen were taking in the waste lands for civilisation could hardly be endured by men used to carpets and cushions.

Antliff (1892:319-28) wrote of Hugh Bourne:

Perhaps no other man ever spent less time in rest, leisure, or recreation. ... His will seemed invincible even to the point of stubbornness. When once he made up his mind, death or victory became his motto. ... grace sanctified this quality of mind, and directed it to noble ends. ... we must claim for him a distinguished place in the front rank of Christian workers.

(Antliff also concedes that Bourne "had his failings; and perhaps the chief of these ... was a hasty and overbearing temper.") Antliff's title *A book of marvels* (Lamb: London, UK, 1873) conveys the same admiration.

George Shaw wrote a biography¹⁸⁰ of John Oxtoby, an auxiliary with William Clowes in the Hull Circuit, who entered the ministry in 1821. The Preface asserts that the "quality shining out through the whole book is the rich seam of dynamic, vibrant and unstoppable faith!"

180 *Life of John Oxtoby* ("Praying Johnny") 1894. Hull, UK: Andrews; reprinted 2002)

Church's 1851 title exudes triumphalism: *Gospel-Victories: or Missionary Anecdotes of Imprisonments, Labours, and Persecutions, endured by Primitive Methodist Preachers between the years 1812 and 1842*.

Henry Woodcock was a minister from 1847. The Preface to his *Piety among the Peasantry, being Sketches of Primitive Methodism on the Yorkshire Wolds* (Primitive Methodist Book Depot, London, UK, 1889) says:

Primitive Methodism made its descent on the Yorkshire Wolds seventy years ago. It stirred the people as they had never been stirred before. Hamlets and villages, where life had run the even tenor of its way, from generation to generation, were roused to a lively and passionate interest in things spiritual and divine.

Slightly earlier are *Verses written and sung by the Newbury Carollers at the Jubilee of Primitive Methodism in Hampshire, June 28th, 1882*¹⁸¹. It rapturously looks back to the coming of the movement. The seven verses were sung to the tune "John Brown's Body":

*When first our fathers battled in the glorious gospel fight,
They oftentimes were beaten, stoned, and placed in jail by night;
By faith and prayer they conquered, nobly stood for God and right,
And preached redemption free.*

*Glory, glory, hallelujah, - Glory, glory, hallelujah,
Glory, glory, hallelujah - We are on our journey home.*

*They saw the thousands rolling in their sins into Death's flood;
And 'mid the dead and dying for their blessed Captain stood,
They preached the mighty cleansing in the fount of Jesu's blood,
That sets the sin-stained free.*

*The Lord was mighty in them, and the Spirit gave them zest,
To preach with burning eloquence, and thousands thus were blessed;
Whilst some today are with us, hundreds are in heaven at rest,
In the mansions of the free.*

The cause has grown and prospered, tens of thousands are set free...

181 document D/MC8/9/2, Berkshire Record Office

Later writers are now cited, not as first-hand witnesses, but as evidence of the panegyric passed on from generation to generation in the denomination's self-perception. Prosser's 1889 title *Heroic Men: the Death Roll of the Primitive Methodist Ministry* breathes the same spirit of adulation. Prosser (1848-1901) was a minister from 1867.

Magazine (1903:203-7) says:

It is with such reverent feelings that we think of the sires of our church, ... They were not the victims of the changeful visible, but were dominated by a simple faith sublime, and so bore unflinching witness to the truth. ... In those chivalrous years our sires were fortified in conscience impregnable.

Tonks (1907:13-4) wrote:

The zeal of its devoted evangelists marks them out as in the Apostolic succession, ... Its resources never included much wealth save the wealth of unquenchable zeal. Because of their love for the souls of their fellows, the evangelists ... unhesitatingly, and uncomplainingly went through storm and flood, thro' hunger, poverty, imprisonment and the most brutal treatment, from those they sought to save. The pioneers ... daily imperilled their all for Christ's sake. No labour seemed too great for them.

Their contemporaries were like them. Long journeys, and little food; often selling their possessions to pay their way; drenched in rain, lost on the road, shelterless at night; such was their common experience. But they won men to God. To quote Mr Horne ... "But if faith and love are the sovereign realities, they were men of high rank and noble worth. These plain, blunt, homely, self-educated evangelists of Primitive Methodism belong to the saints and heroes of England."

Thompson (n.d. (1907?): 1-2,11-2), in an overview of PM history entitled *The miraculous river*, wrote:

I never think of the romantic beginnings and the marvellous history of our beloved Church without being reminded of the vision which came to Ezekiel ... Primitive Methodism is that miraculous medicinal river over again.

Indeed, by the year 1842, the marvellous radiating arms of the River of God had more or less covered the whole land like a gleaming network.

Ritson (1911:99, 127):

The pioneers of Primitive Methodism were to an extraordinary degree inspired with the passion of Divine love, and made ceaseless war upon the kingdom of darkness. Their heroic exploits, their herculean labours, their hairbreadth escapes, their quenchless zeal, their dauntless courage, their unfailing audacity, their fierce fight with poverty and hunger and weariness and mob brutality, and the marvellous and permanent success they achieved is one long romance which has added a new and brilliant chapter to the Acts of the Apostles.

But some of the most astonishing triumphs were won by the pioneers among the agricultural labourers in the south of England.

Here is Barber (1932:81-5) on the PM pioneers and people:

The early Primitive Methodists were subject to frequent persecution, particularly in the more southern counties. ... Yet no persecution damped their ardour or clouded their faith. In all their trials they revealed an unconquerable spirit ... Through all the years, whatever their difficulties, they bore a good witness, ever singing their joyful songs...

It is not without significance that our founders were regarded as a class apart - an original and unmistakable stamp, a unique brand, even among Methodists.

Also from 1932 are some words of Harper (pages 14-5):

I love to think of our church in the dawn of her glory. I love ... the volcanic fire of her heart, the thrill of song, the buoyant testimony of her saints. I love her because of her unquenchable ideals, the largeness of her hope, the untiring energies of her faith.

And, from page 6 of the 1932 *Primitive Methodist Year Book*, the Conference Address to the Churches, delivered by Edward McLellan:

We knew that the glory of our past was not in the material monument that has been built up, but in the wonder of rugged souls, aflame with zeal, constrained by a passionate love, and counting all things but loss, except they lived to serve.

Pearces's title *Burning and shining Lights: a Souvenir of Primitive Methodist Radiant Personalities* (1935) exemplifies the admiration.

Wilkes and Lovatt (1942) dedicate their book to “All ex-Primitive Methodists who are proud of their great history, their splendid traditions and the spiritual heritage they have inherited from The Men of Mow.”

Wilkinson (1951:vii, 87) wrote, “Few evangelists of the Gospel of Christ have laboured more fervently and unceasingly than William Clowes, ... The secret of his greatness and the mainspring of his achievement was in the splendour of his interior life. ... No wonder that in his closing days he had a glorious apprehension of the Celestial City”.

Johnson (1989) waxes lyrical in his doctoral thesis: “the simple, but dynamic activity of the Harriseahead revivalists, as they swept across the moorlands of North Staffordshire like a heather fire.”

Milburn (2002:16-7) refers to the early preachers’ “faith, zeal and courage ... an irrepressible spirit of fulfilment and joy,” though he is not silent about some of Hugh Bourne’s imperfections.

Weakness, Doubt, Sins, Failings, Tragedy

In reality the preachers and their adherents were thoroughly human. The Magazine (1837:381) describes local preacher Elizabeth Farr as “a timid Christian but her love to souls and her desire for their salvation was great.” When Russell was offered a choice of serving in Berkshire or Stroudwater, he records (undated:15): “Thinking there was nothing on the mission to lose even if I failed, I made choice of Berkshire; ... But my spirits were low, and I was burdened with doubts and fears as to the success of the great work in which I was engaged.” Here are some words from Russell’s account of his life (pages 12-3, 47) up to the time he left Hampshire:

Fearing my want of success, for I was low in spirits, I left my box to come after me. I took with me only part of my clothes and a few books, so as to last me awhile, but it was twelve months before I had courage to send for my other luggage.

They inquired from whence I came, and of my origin: this was soon told, as also my hopes, for they were few.

At night, preached at Stratton; and from hence followed my appointments, yet with sorrow and pain, not knowing at times whether to return home or not.

Preached at Facombe ... But oh! the sorrow of my mind when entering this place.

Elizabeth Smith wondered on setting out as a travelling preacher, “What shall I do when my clothes are worn out; where shall I go for more?” §C will demonstrate that her sense of calling was susceptible to being seriously challenged. In her letter of 9th April 1828 she writes¹⁸²:

I then wanted counsel and comfort myself: the waves of trouble were breaking in upon my soul; I felt all the sorrow of a wounded spirit; ... The cause of my trouble was this: about a fortnight previous to that time I was attacked by two clergymen; and their attack was of a nature to discourage me. And when I was alone the enemy of souls harassed me: and my weak faith sunk, and I began to reason on the work of God in preaching the gospel.

These men reprobated the idea of a woman being useful in the work; the enemy backed their arguments...

When I had spoken to the people, I could not pray for a blessing on what I had delivered; neither could I, for two days, pour out my soul in private; and I had no one to direct me.

She also had difficulties with theodicy and temptation to atheism. As Russell wrote in his account of her life (page 191):

I have heard her frequently say, that very great were her conflicts. One of her great conflicts was temptation to atheism; the enemy suggesting that such severe trials were inconsistent with the government of a righteous and holy God.

Another trying perplexity concerning the work is recorded by her in April 1831¹⁸³ in these words:

Satan continually suggested that the work in the Berkshire mission would fly away like chaff, and melt like snow before the sun. The dreadful case of one backslider confirmed the temptations. The effect was, I gave way, and spoke peevishly, and then gave up my confidence of the evidence of perfect love.

Magazine (1878:57) concedes in its obituary of James Mules, who (as noted in Chapter 5C) ministered in Silchester:

182 Russell (2005:189)

183 Russell (2005:204)

Especially was he susceptible of severe nervous depression. ... He suffered much at times from the apprehension of disease and death, few men more. ... We have no doubt he suffered more in his lifetime through apprehensions of death than what most persons suffer when dying.

William Antliff's *A Book of marvels*¹⁸⁴ carries a report from Robert Langford in the Shefford Circuit - the man largely responsible for bringing the PMs to Micheldever. He was appointed to preach at West Ilsley on 29th May 1835:

I felt deeply depressed, and knew not why. Nevertheless I joined in the service of the sanctuary, and it felt "good to be there." At the close of the meeting ... I commenced my journey, though with depressed spirits. ... But neither the grandeur of nature's scenes, the whisper of evening zephyrs, the soft wail of the summer breezes, nor the melody of Philomela's song, could cheer my flagged spirits or raise my drooping mind.

Here I may just say that for several weeks previous to this time I had been oppressed with the thought that something was about to take place which would deprive me of my left leg. Indeed, the ill-omens went to such an extent that I have at times fancied I felt the jar of a wooden leg under me.

When he reached about a mile from Shefford he was waylaid by four muggers, severely beaten up, and robbed. "So terrible was the shock, that I have never fully recovered from it. I have never since been the man I was before. Thus the villains unmanned me," though it cured his fear of losing a leg.

The Reading Circuit Report of 1851, when Edward Bishop was aged 40, records that "Brother E. Bishop attempted to resume his labours on the 16th of June; and again on the 7th of July¹⁸⁵, but was compelled to relinquish them again for want of strength. His illness was a nervous fever." The following year's Report reveals that "Brother Edward Bishop's health has been much improved during the last year; but it is not, by any means, re-established." In December 1848 the Reading Circuit Quarterly Minute Book records the decision "that Bro W Merritt's name come off the plan being considered not in a sound state of mind."

Farr, Russell, Smith, Mules, Langford, Bishop, Merritt: these are not the experiences of confident, invulnerable titans.

184 London, UK: Lamb (1873:311-5)

185 i.e. in 1850; these were Sundays.

Substandard behaviour was another recurrent problem. The Mitcheldever Circuit quarterly meeting of June 1835 agreed that “Henry Prior go off our Plan for slandering the Traveling Preachers and insubjection to this Meeting.” The December 1839 meeting decided that “Daniel Baker be left off the plan”; in September 1840 it agreed to prohibit James Grantham from praying in public for six weeks; another was disciplined in June 1842; and the March 1845 meeting removed Joshua Anthony from the Plan: all “for immoral conduct”. The 21st century tends to interpret “immoral” in sexual terms, but a June 1847 minute from the Oswestry Circuit shows a wider meaning: “That Bro Andrew Mansell committed an act of gross immorality in going to his master on the Sunday to receive his wages, and that he be requested to cease from such conduct forthwith.”

The Reading Circuit quarterly meeting of September 1851 recorded that a report had circulated “that Brother James Taylor had acted with some indiscretion towards his female servant”. It had been ascertained that “some part of such report was true”, and so he was suspended “for the present” from his appointments.

In 1842 and 1844 respectively, the Micheldever circuit committee suspended Thomas Merritt from preaching till the next quarter day “having been overseen in Liquor,” and James Ball on account of “several unfavourable reports about his debts.” Other suspensions in 1844 were Benjamin Collis and J. Anthony for drunkenness. Mitcheldever quarterly meeting of June 1845 agreed that “R. Watmore come off the plan for his dalliance with young women and getting drunk.” The Andover Circuit quarterly meetings provide similar reading from May 1837 to September 1852: six were removed from the Plan for immoral conduct, another for “unsuitable conduct”, another for improper conduct in business affairs. A Note was to be “written to R. Russell for his conduct in corresponding with an ungodly young woman &c.”; and two women spoken to “about their screaming and harsh language”.

The Reading Circuit Quarterly Minutes for 1837 to 1849 record the decision to remove certain names from the Plan for the reasons given: one for “having brought a young woman into trouble”; seven for “immoral conduct”; three for drunkenness; three for refusal to work, debt, and sowing discord.

The Mitcheldever Circuit committee frequently discussed and attempted to find ways to deal with gossip, quarrelling and bad relationships among members. They agreed in September 1842 that “Richard Pavey and Eliza Compton of Dummer be put out of Society for bad conduct.” In October 1843 they resolved: “James Lock and C. Wright to be put out of society if it can be proved they

were intoxicated the 5 instant”, and in 1844 they expelled Rebecca Ball for quarrelling with Mrs Church of Newnham and telling “several untruths.”

The Reading Circuit Reports of 1842-6 record the loss of “official characters” for immoral conduct, drunkenness, not paying debts, insolvency, card-playing, going to Ascot races, with one for leaving his wife, and two as “fallen”.

In 1845 a local preacher’s resignation was accepted by the Mitcheldever Circuit committee after he had spent the circuit’s money to repair his house and then “turning the preaching out.” Garratt (2002:94) comments that “Perhaps the most common disciplinary matter dealt with by local circuit authorities was that of drunkenness.”

The troubles at Silchester chronicled Chapter 5C seem to have been handled in an ungracious and confrontational manner which led to the loss or disaffection of local preachers, society members and chapel trustees; and maybe there was truth in the accusations lodged against Charles Ford.

Such human failings and weaknesses were not peculiar to Hampshire. Dissension, drunkenness and other misdemeanours, real or cultural, plagued the Oswestry Circuit. Sheard (1980:452-3) writes concerning the Preston Brook circuit in the years straddling 1840 that “the major problem was created by what was called ‘some serious cases of immorality which occurred in the circuit’. More than a dozen local preachers were dismissed for drunkenness, immorality or ‘other improprieties’ between 1840 and 1843.” He then refers to “a similar situation in Macclesfield circuit a few years earlier.” He also uncovered dissension among members. Johnson (1989) says: “Of all the occasions for expulsion or censure, those troubles related to drunkenness appears to have been the most frequent reason. Adultery and indebtedness were other persistent failures. Primitive Methodists were not stained-glass window saints, but men.”

Their humanity also included passing through the sorrows common to human life. Richard Jukes’s first wife, Phoebe, born 1805, died less than ten months after their marriage (Magazine 1828:11). Ride’s wife died after which he wrote, “I felt very desolate.” Less than four years later he received news of the death of his youngest child. Russell’s daughter Julia died of smallpox at the age of 16 months in 1835; his wife died four months later. Elizabeth Smith suffered persistent ill health, and needed to rest for eleven weeks in 1831. When she recovered enough to begin work again, she

wrote, “I know if I go home I shall travel no more.”¹⁸⁶ Russell adds (page 203) that “she was of opinion the sorrow she bore for them helped lay the foundation of her dissolution.”

Nor were the pioneers immune to untimely death: Elizabeth Smith from poor health, aged 31, and Aaron Bell from drowning, aged 21, are examples. Elizabeth Farr of Binley died in 1847 (*Magazine* 1849:381-2) after being paralysed on one side of her body for twelve years, during the latter part of which she was confined first to the house, then to her chair, in which she was carried to and from bed. It was noted in Chapter 5C that Reading Circuit sent James Mules to reside in Silchester in the time of their great trouble. He never enjoyed robust health, and “discussion or controversy was not congenial to his nature.” The bitterness and turmoil at Silchester would have been a severe trial to his nature at any time, but shortly before his move there, in January 1851, his wife Eliza died in childbirth, aged 27. A sense of the value to him of her spiritual fellowship, and therefore of his loss, can be gleaned from his obituary of her: “her pathetic and fervent orisons, mingled with frequent doxologies for mercies received, would generally melt me down, and create much devotional ardour.”¹⁸⁷ It cannot be said about these early PMs that the Lord had “made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side” (Job 1:10).

Assessment

The pioneers were indubitably heroes, who attained “astonishing achievements”. It is difficult to see how so many testimonies and admiring records of public events, by so many writers, over so long a period, published so soon after the events, as the research for this thesis revealed, could be wholly false, when so many opposers could quickly have unmasked the falsity. Followers would have been disillusioned, opponents vindicated. The authors are named; many were contemporary with the events, or took part in them, or were personally acquainted with the actors in the dramas. It is also difficult to see how the image of a denomination which, by 1851, numbered over 106,000 members, and gathered over half a million attendances on census Sunday (Snell and Ell (2000:135)), could be a misleading legend constructed by one man.

Against this must be set their subjection to weaknesses and temptation, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual, and to common human tragedies. Sometimes they did not triumph blamelessly in every snare or difficulty. They were not the conquering titans that some panegyrics

186 Russell (2005:204)

187 *Magazine* (1851:318)

seek to make of them, passing unscathed from victory to victory. The mistakes, frailties, follies, sins and tragedies do not negate the respect and admiration of which their characters and achievements are worthy. The hagiographic portrayals convey much truth, but need to be set against acknowledgement of weaknesses, failings and humanity.

B: LEGALISM

PM pioneers sought to be committed to the propagation of a pure, free salvation drawn from divinely inspired scripture, without addition or subtraction, the very gospel taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles and blessed by the presence and power of the Spirit of God within the movement. Chapter 5 confirmed their “most astonishing achievements”, but a feature which runs through the history of the movement is an abundance of regulations, some repressive, some intrusive. This chapter calls this strain in the religion *legalism*, concedes that it was an unpleasant feature, and argues that it modifies the panegyric cited in the previous section.

There is a great difference between voluntarily applying rules and disciplines to oneself in order to help oneself conform to a desired way of life, and imposing those same disciplines on others. The latter is legalism, and can all too easily lead to a feeling of moral or spiritual superiority often characterised by the phrase ‘holier than thou’, and to an attitude of censure and disdain towards those who fail or refuse to comply. As Morris (1967:384) writes: “Primitive Methodist morality was severely strict even for Victorian England ... As with puritans of all ages some Primitive Methodists were guilty of ‘a holier than thou’ attitude, and of being excessively harsh in their judgements of other people.” “Regulations” is the word the PM Minutes use to describe requirements which were imposed on, or recommended to, preachers and members in the Connexion. Some of them will be shown to be restrictive or pettifogging. Royle¹⁸⁸ describes this as “the cultural struggle between popular customs and moral improvement”. It was not peculiar to PMism, though it is arguable that PMs pursued it more strenuously than many other Evangelicals of the time.

188 email, 3.12.2013

The twofold Argument

The contention of this chapter is first that the legalism which the PMs developed is alien to New Testament religion, and thereby points to an inconsistency within PMism, namely, that they professed to derive their religion solely from scripture, but in fact imposed upon their members, and in some cases attempted to impose also on non-members, a considerable number of restrictions which are absent from scripture.

The Magazine (1852:462-8), in an article entitled *The Sufficiency of Holy Scripture as a rule of faith and practice*, asserts that:

Protestant Churches affirm the written word to be the only sufficient and authoritative rule of faith and practice, ... As the Bible thus contains all things needful to a rule of life, so nothing has been added thereto from the resources of man's own mind. ... The Scriptures are never superseded. All human additions to the Scriptures are forbidden.

In the previous section, the 1853 Magazine (page 75) was quoted, describing the PMs' message as "the simple testimony of the Gospel ... scriptural Christianity." The same year's Magazine (1853:590-601) argues at length that the scriptures, "of Divine origin and authority", are the sole source of Christian belief and practice:

the Scriptures are your guide book, containing all needful admonition and directions, ... They are the rule of your faith and practice, and you should read them in order to know your duty and perform it. ... Their superiority to any code of laws, or system of morality, invented by man, must be admitted by every impartial judge. ... Human laws have no power over the conscience, but the precepts of Scripture are enforced by the solemn declaration, "Thus saith the Lord."

The annual circuit reports required confirmation that a full, free and present salvation was being preached, and such salvation was indeed preached from the guilt of sin, but the addition of so many restrictive accretions rendered it less full: it offered to make people free from sin, but it did not free them from (in the words of the Magazine) a *system of morality, invented by man*. Their Bibles addressed them thus: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of ... the sabbath days: ... Wherefore ... why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

(Touch not; taste not; handle not; ...) after the commandments and doctrines of men?”¹⁸⁹ They claimed to be offering a *sola scriptura* faith, but they were demonstrably violating their own principle. PM legalism evinces an inconsistency regarding scripture, which nowhere prescribes many of the limitations they imposed on believers and outsiders. The hagiography does not take this into account.

Secondly, pioneers were not entirely the clear-sighted leaders of the hagiography, for their legalism both contributed to the distaste with which PMs came to be viewed, and prepared the way for the later diversion of resources from the denomination’s original purposes, thus contributing doubly to subsequent stagnation and decline.

The Legalism

THE TEETOTAL MOVEMENT

No Christian is opposed to temperance, which means moderation and is enjoined in the scriptures, where drunkenness is forbidden, but the movement towards teetotalism, sometimes falsely called ‘temperance’, grew into a major aspect of PMism and came to consume considerable human and financial resources.

Teetotalism was not a feature of early PMism. Tonks (1907:82-4), writing about the Brinkworth Circuit, relates that:

For long, beer had a place on the Quarterly Meeting dinner table, and not in small quantities; a barrel was consumed thereat as late as 1838. Publicans were found among the most influential officials, and the growth of the anti-intoxicant movement was very gradual at first.

At the 1827 PM Conference (Kendall, Vol. I:470) legislation was proposed to the effect that the trustees of chapels should be desired or required “to provide wine for the use of the preachers, either before preaching, to give them a little spirit for their work, or after preaching to revive their exhausted energies.” But Hugh Bourne resisted the proposal, and it was rejected.

Clowes was not a teetotaller. Milburn (2002:59) asserts that “The Primitive Methodist Connexion was not teetotal from its origins. In that early period there must have been a fairly general

189 Colossians 2:16-22

acceptance of beer and ale for personal consumption, and the provision of wine, or some other beverage, for the refreshment of preachers was common. The turning point came in the early 1830s.” Oswestry Circuit quarterly minutes for December 1836 record the resolution “That no teetotalism meeting be held in any of the chapels in this Circuit,” but as soon afterwards as September 1837 the same board resolved that “there be a teetotal meeting in Oswestry chapel.” Then in December 1837 the first resolution of the preachers’ meeting was “That there be no discussion on Teetotalism at Quarter Day to hinder or prevent the progress of business.” At that stage the matter was still contentious.

PMs gave their support to temperance societies at their 1832 conference and were soon among the leading advocates. Knight (2008:180) observes that “the majority of British evangelicals delayed their support for teetotalism until the 1860s.” Yet as early as 1836, the PM Minutes of Conference record a proposal “that our preachers and members use every prudential means to encourage Temperance societies.” Many of the leading ministers became pledged abstainers and zealous advocates of the cause. The Magazine (1841:430) printed an extract from ‘an official letter’ from the Connexion’s General Committee for distribution throughout the Connexion, in which, it should be noted, the practice is to be prudently recommended, not imposed or required: “It is well known that our Connexion approves of Teetotalism, and recommends the prudent advocacy of it.”

In September 1849 the Andover Circuit quarterly meeting agreed that “Allington Society be allowed to hold a Temperance Meeting.” The Reading Circuit resolved¹⁹⁰ in December 1851 “That there be a Temperance meeting on next Thursday evening in the School Room.”

Hugh Bourne visited the extensive Reading Circuit and reported: “Being with Brother John Ride ... I, at his pressing request, preached a teetotal sermon in our chapel at Great Marlow. This gave such satisfaction, especially to Brother John Ride, who was delighted to hear teetotalism set forth in a religious way.” Bourne also preached teetotal sermons “at Reading to a large congregation. I preached this at the request of Brother John Ride and others.” The phrase *teetotal sermon* might be deemed oxymoronic, if a sermon is a speech based on scripture, for scripture knows nothing of teetotalism, stating rather that God gave “wine which strengtheneth man’s heart” (Psalm 104:15), and that Jesus Christ “came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber’” (Matthew 11:19).

190 Quarterly Minute Book

The Andover Circuit quarterly meeting of March 1848 went further, aiming to impose its legalism upon outsiders by decree of Parliament: it resolved “that it be recommended that our various Societies send Petitions to Parliament against Sabbath day tippling.” Tippling is habitual drinking of alcohol, not drinking for thirst.

TOBACCO

There was also a lurking disapproval of smoking, before the days when medical science discovered its ruinous effects on health. The 1828 Conference Minutes stipulate: “No preacher who is a smoker of tobacco shall be deemed to have completed his probation, unless he produce a certificate from a physician of advice, certifying that it is necessary for his health.”

Conference Minutes, 1845, say: “When a Circuit shall apply to the General Committee for permission to take out a preacher to travel, it must furnish written answers to the following questions:... 5. Does he smoke tobacco? if he do, to what extent?”

DRESS and HAIR STYLE

The 1819 Conference Minutes (page 5) say:

- *In what dress shall our travelling preachers appear in public?*
- *In a plain one. The men to wear single breasted coats, single breasted waistcoats, and their hair in its natural form; and not to be allowed to wear pantaloons, trowsers ... and that our female preachers be patterns of plainness in all their dress.*

Such restrictions derive from horror of all appearance or hint of pride, but they place stern limits on the preachers’ liberty of thought, conscience and action.

The 1822 Conference¹⁹¹ required travelling and local preachers and exhorters not to “wear their coats without collars in future, except those who have them may be permitted to wear them out.” The 1828 Conference Minutes stipulate *that all our travelling preachers do enforce plainness of dress both by example and by precept, and also do advise with members on this point.*

191 Minutes, page 3

The rule against preachers wearing ‘trowsers’, which was repeated in 1828¹⁹², was rescinded in 1830¹⁹³, but the 1831 Conference¹⁹⁴ repeated the remainder of the minute and added that “plainness of dress is strongly recommended to all our Local Preachers, leaders and members.”

A notable instance of legalism is found on pages 104-5 of Clowes’ *Journals*, referring to an undated event in the period 1812-8 at the home of a farmer called Byatt near Alton, Staffordshire:

I accepted an invitation to preach in their house, when the Lord gave me their daughter Mary as a seal to my ministry. I spoke to her in the name of the Lord on the subject of laying her curls aside, and becoming plain in dress, as a Christian ought to be who adorns the gospel. ... and when she came down stairs she had stripped off her curls, and was attired as a Christian professor ought to be.

There were a number of people in Staffordshire around that time with the name Mary Byatt. The earliest census which provides names and approximate ages is 1841, and the only unmarried Mary Byatt in Alton (other than one born about 1833) was born around 1801 and was the daughter of Elizabeth Byatt; Clowes’s convert may have been this one, or she may have been the daughter of William and Hannah Byatt who was christened at Alton on 9th February 1806. Thus she was probably a teenager at the time of Clowes’ visit, and the requirement to “strip off her curls” if she was to look like a good Christian seems both repressive and at variance with the fact that the Bible speaks approvingly of the beauty of a woman’s hair.¹⁹⁵ Women’s hairstyle in the first decade of the nineteenth century was characterised by curls on the forehead and above the ears, and the hair held with a knot or a chignon at the back of the neck¹⁹⁶. Young women and girls often wore long tresses in braids, or long cascading ringlet curls.¹⁹⁷ Clowes doubtless saw curled hair as a step towards worldly vanity, but his demand seems aggressive, intrusive, and suppressive of personality and of natural *joie de vivre*. Whilst it is true that 1 Timothy 2:9 says: “I will ... that women adorn themselves ... with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair,” and although “all readings are culturally determined interpretations and so in different ages different people will read scripture

192 Minutes of Conference, 1828:33

193 Minutes, page 5

194 Minutes, page 30

195 1 Corinthians 11:15: “it is a glory to her.” See also Ecclesiastes 4:1.

196 Gustavo Briand (n.d.) *Nineteenth Century* Retrieved from website: http://thehistoryofthehairworld.com/hair_19th_century.html

197 anon (n.d.) Retrieved from website: <http://www.hairfinder.com/hair/1800shairstyles.htm>

in different ways”¹⁹⁸, this points to a PM tendency to push interpretation and application to an extreme.

The Reading Circuit quarterly minutes for December 1840 require “That the Preachers in the Circuit conform to the rules, relative to their Hair and Dress;” and in September 1844 “That Bro Gilbert shall wear his hair in its natural form.” The same 1844 meeting decided “That Bro Gilbert shall wear his watch in his [illegible] Pocket.” The style of a man’s sideboards was a matter for a resolution of the Brinkworth Circuit in 1835.¹⁹⁹ At the 1837 Conference, a charge was brought against William Clowes for allowing John Flesher to be appointed as a delegate, for a portrait of him suggested - wrongly - that he was wearing a double-breasted coat.

Sartorial plainness was “strongly recommended” “to our brethren, the Stewards, Local Preachers, Leaders and private Members, both Male and Female” by the 1819 conference.²⁰⁰ The 1822 Conference²⁰¹ desired that “in future, all our local preachers and exhorters shall appear in the same plain uniformity of dress as the travelling preachers.”

Nuttall (1967:204-17), in the chapter on “Early Quakerism and early Primitive Methodism” compares the PM sartorial code with that of the early Quakers. Dews (1984:365, 449) points out that Hugh Bourne read a number of books about Quakers both before and after his evangelical conversion, and also had contact with the Quaker Methodists of Warrington; and he alludes to a resolution of the Hull Circuit Quarterly Meeting of December 1819: “E. Taylor to take care of the Singers pew & to let none in only those that appear in plain dress. Men Plain Coats & no pantaloons. Women no frills No Bunches of Ribbons no curls & no superfluities whatever.”

To this day, people whose convictions impel them to dress in ways conspicuously different from the rest of society are seen as oddities, and often attract distaste and hostility. By pressing their justifiable opposition to gaudy or ostentatious excess to an extreme, the PMs contributed to their reputation for self-righteousness, gloom, and disconnection among the people they hoped to convert. This must counterbalance the laudatory assertions of some of their later admirers.

198 Royle, email 4.12.2013

199 Tonks (1907:109)

200 Minutes, page 5

201 Minutes, page 3

LEISURE

The Conference Minutes of 1831 state: “None must be continued as members of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, who attend vain and worldly amusements, waste their time at public houses, ... If any member transgress the rules, he must be required to appear before the leaders’ meeting.” The Reading Circuit Quarterly Minutes record a resolution in March 1838 “That the Superintendent see G. Church relating to his playing musick at his Club.” In June 1844 the same Circuit resolved that Jesse Herbert plus two others “have a note informing him that our connexion does not allow its members and official characters to attend worldly amusements.”

An activity which was perhaps similar to today’s carol singing was an object of disapproval²⁰²: “All our members are strongly recommended to refrain from going out in the night on what is called Christmas singing.” Before carol singing in public became popular²⁰³, there were official carol singers called ‘Waits’, bands of people led by important local leaders who had the only power in the towns and villages to take money from the public (if others did this, they were sometimes charged as beggars). A slightly different description is given by Margaret Baker in *Christmas Customs and Folklore* (1968:51, Shire Publications, Aylesbury, UK):

The visit of the Waits was once an inseparable part of Christmas. No one now knows if the term originally applied to the musical instruments they carried, the music they played, or the players themselves, but by the mid-nineteenth century it had come to mean the group of musicians who toured the town in the night during the weeks before Christmas. Usually they played wind instruments and any popular music of the day, not necessarily carols, and after a performance money or drinks were expected from the householders.

It is recorded²⁰⁴ that:

At Chaddleworth, high on the Berkshire downs, the village waits, with fiddles, oboes, serpents and clarinets, snowflakes sparkling in the soft yellow light of their lanterns, sang when all were in bed; and in Somerset, ‘holly riders’, with berry-wreathed hats, rode round the hill-farms ... singing carols for cakes, cider and pennies.

202 Conference Minutes 1834:8

203 James Cooper (2013) *The History of Christmas Carols* Retrieved from whychristmas.com:
www.whychristmas.com/customs/carols_history

204 Margaret Baker (1974:91) *Folklore and Customs of Rural England* (Newton Abbot, UK: David & Charles)

Russell (1886:205) notes that it was at Chaddleworth that he was arrested, and that on an occasion when Elizabeth Smith preached there, a magistrate attempted to arrest two of her congregation: one was a former wrestler, who tumbled the magistrate into a ditch with nettles, saying, “We came here peaceably to worship God; when you come again, behave yourself, and all will be well.”

Carols were not necessarily Christian songs; pleasure was enjoyed in unconverted company; and alcohol was involved. From the outsider’s perspective, it gave the PMs something else to disapprove of, and doubtless increased their reputation as aloof kill-joys.

Tea parties also came under disapproval. Minutes of Conference, 1836, say: “We recommend all our preachers and members not to encourage public tea parties, except for Sunday schools”. An 1847 resolution of the Brinkworth Circuit “strongly disapproves of members playing at the game of Kissing in the Ring”.²⁰⁵

Sabbath-breaking was considered a serious offence, and there is repeated emphasis on ‘Sunday tippling’. The Reading Circuit quarterly meeting resolved in December 1845 “That the circuit committee investigate a charge of Sunday traffic against Brother [illegible] on Christmas day at 2 o’clock.” The PM Consolidated Minutes published in 1849 laid down that: “All our members are earnestly entreated to discourage sabbath breaking, by refraining from travelling and working themselves, except in cases of necessity or mercy, and by discouraging public bakers and other persons from yielding to that vice.”

The deliberations at these meetings sometimes seem intrusive. Following the Leaders’ Meeting of 11th October, 1844, and the Committee meeting of the Reading Circuit, the quarterly minutes state: “That it is our opinion that John Swain and Sarah Rowley both missed there way in there Cortship.”

Ambler (1989) gives a range of very similar disciplinary examples in south Lincolnshire, mainly in the late 1850s to the 1870s, which does not mean that such regulations did not operate earlier, but perhaps simply that he has selected from the later years. Matters which attracted censure in the Prees and Oswestry circuits include walking together too much before marriage, going to the conjurer, using the pawnbroker, attending the annual hunt, and preaching for the Independent Methodists; and John Mason was to be requested “not to ride his beast in such an unusual manner.” Garratt (2002:94) adds going to the circus.

205 Tonks (1907:112)

The portrayal: joyless, uncaring Legalism

(a) Fiction

Methodists and other Dissenters are depicted as lacking in joy themselves and kill-joys in their relations with others. Much work has been undertaken to document this trend. Cunningham (1975) fills over 300 pages proving and discussing it. The pilloried Nonconformists are not always identified as Methodists, though Methodists were the largest Dissenting body. Cunningham (1975:63), writing of Victorian literature, explains:

Of all the available varieties of possible Dissenting subjects, Methodism enjoys by far the highest incidence in the Victorian novel. This is presumably related to Methodism's numerical predominance, but also ... to the fact that if one wanted to charge Dissent as a whole with being hectic, narrow, ill-educated, and so on, one could find those things as readily, if not more readily, in some form of Methodism as elsewhere.

On pages 9-10 he says:

The Dissenter suffers in Victorian fiction from extensive illiberality at the hands of the novelists who, however, introduce him on such an ample, indeed liberal, scale into their novels...

Chapel-life in the novels is usually presented as being so life-denying, so uniformly dreary, and the members are so unattractive, the preachers so grotesque, that it is difficult on such a showing to see why people bothered to belong.

Royle (1987:300) writes, including Anglican Evangelicals in the term *Methodist*, that “‘Methodist’ became a by-word for a puritanical kill-joy”. The Literature Review noted Dickinson (2012:310): “most nineteenth-century novels dismissed Methodism as a distasteful or hypocritical sect.”

It is often remarked that Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* by George Eliot (1819-1880), set in 1799, is presented as a winsome Methodist preacher of good character. But here, from the same novel, is a sentence about a stranger visiting the village: “he had felt sure that her face would be mantled with the smile of conscious saintship, or else charged with denunciatory bitterness. He knew but two types of Methodist—the ecstatic and the bilious.” The stereotypical Methodist lurks in the background, for bilious means spiteful and bad-tempered. *Adam Bede* himself, in old age, reminisces about an unpopular Anglican clergyman in these words in Chapter 17: “few clergymen

could be less successful in winning the hearts of their parishioners ... he scolded 'em from the pulpit as if he'd been a Ranter."

Other examples include Rudyard Kipling's words, "Riley insisted on Reggie's reading the Bible and grim "Methody" tracts to him" (*Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888)). Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch's *Dead Man's Rock* (1887), Chapter 1, mentions 'a Methodist from "up the country," ... this religion was of a joyless and gloomy order, full of anticipations of hell-fire and conviction of the sinfulness of ordinary folk.'

(b) Non-fiction

In non-fiction, Jefferies (1892:64) portrays Wiltshire Methodists of the early 1870s thus:

In one cottage one may find an upright, stern-featured man ... who is the representative of the old Puritan, though the denomination to which he may belong is technically known as the Methodist. He is stern, hard, uncompromising - one who sets duty above affection. ... aloof from his fellows.

Thompson (1939:54) comments that only about half a dozen men "held aloof" from the evening gathering in the pub, "and those were either known to 'have religion', or suspected of being 'close wi' their pence'." The association of meanness and teetotalism was easily made.

Morris (1967:149, 164) writes at length about PM legalism, referring to "a strict, almost puritanical, system of discipline," and comments on the "extreme strictness" revealed in the 1840s Mansfield Quarterly Meeting minutes, where he perceives a "lack of charity" and "an unwarranted assumption of guilt concerning members' sexual relationships". On page 165 he writes: "In some instances the ethical code of Primitive Methodists tended to make them people who had harsh and cold personalities, often lacking in charity and generosity ... the Primitive Methodist attitude to personal conduct and morals seemed unnecessarily negative and repressive".

Conclusion

Although some regulations can arguably be based on biblical texts, they are pushed to an extreme. They rob the Christian of the very liberty of conscience which the Magazine articles quoted above say is inviolable. Curling one's hair or allowing one's watch to show might be deemed vain display. Sartorial plainness might be a safeguard against ostentation. Restrictions on the use of Sunday

depend on believing both that the Jewish sabbath was imposed upon Gentiles, and that God transferred it to Sunday. These are matters of interpretation.

Other regulations find no mention in scripture at all: smoking, the time spent walking with the woman one will marry, preaching for another denomination, using a pawnshop, joining in Christmas singing, attending an annual hunt.

Others are hard to define, leaving the way open for pangs of suspected guilt to any tender conscience. What are “worldly amusements”? Whilst kissing in the ring could sensibly be discouraged to avoid sexual arousal, how much time can be spent in a public house without it being deemed wasted, and what biblical principle does playing music at a social club offend?

There can be no doubt that certain personality types revel in inhabiting an ambience of such regulations, and grow pettifogging and offensive in their zeal to see them applied. This 1849 minute from the Prees Circuit, despite its caveat, supplies a likely example: “That a note be sent to Bro S. Burton stating that we disapprove of him interfering so much about dress and heir both in private and in public. Nevertheless we advise all our preachers and members not to conform to the world in these respects.”

Furthermore, a tendency developed for energy and resources to be diverted from a primitive purpose of Methodism (“You have nothing to do but save souls”) into striving for the PM way of life to be imposed on society in general. Andover’s recommendation “that our various Societies send Petitions to Parliament against Sabbath day tippling” has been noted. Morris (1967:167) comments, “in the second half of the Connexion’s history more energy and talents appear to have been spent on combating these moral issues than on evangelism”. The desire to reform individuals and communities by spiritual regeneration was buttressed or even overtaken by reformation imposed by law on unbelievers. This Constantinian approach to social *mores* differed discordantly from the call to personal repentance and regeneration which characterised the ardour of the early movement. Nor were the PMs first in this. Wesley, in his 1763 *Sermon preached before the Society for the Reformation of Manners* commends that Society because, bringing offenders before Magistrates, “They proceeded to a more difficult attempt, the preventing tippling on the Lord’s day, spending time in alehouses, which ought to be spent in the more immediate worship of God.” Wesley records that from August 1762 to January 1763, 400 persons were “brought to justice” for Sabbath-breaking. Clowes related, in the fifth chapter of his autobiography, how he and some associates also brought people before the magistrates for tippling on Sundays.

Some regulations were assuredly “the leaven of the Pharisees”²⁰⁶, intrusive, restrictive, and carrying the risk that PMism would be viewed as, or become, a legalistic sect, especially as the early fervour declined from about mid-century. They supplied considerable ammunition to opposers of Methodism down to the present day. The portrayal can claim significant verisimilitude. Looking back from the standpoint of 1932, Harper commented (page 15): “It is not denied that there was in the early years of the Church a superficial narrowness, ludicrous limitations and eccentricities.” Legalism was an aspect of PM life which must injure the image received from hagiographers, for in it they were neither consistent nor wise.

C: FEMINISM

Too much has been claimed in portraying PMs as forerunners of 20th century feminism, but it is not open to question that they allowed rôles to women which other denominations forbade. Although women functioned in trusteeship, class leading, and public prayer, this section focuses only on the use of women as preachers, both local and itinerant.

PMism was unusual, indeed almost unique, in its widespread use of female preachers. This section will engage with comment which commends and praises this feature of PMism as a forerunner of feminism, and with the PMs’ own defence of their use of female preachers. It will argue that the motivation of PM polity has been misunderstood, and that the PMs themselves were chronically confused and inconsistent. The word “church” in the argument denotes a local body of Christians who meet regularly to worship God and edify one another by means of prayer, teaching, fellowship, and the Lord’s Supper.

Wesleyans

In his *Notes on the New Testament* Wesley offers the following comments:

I Timothy 2:11-2 [I suffer not a woman to teach, nor] To usurp authority over the man. By public teaching.

206 Mark 8:15

I Corinthians 11:5 But every woman - Who, under an immediate impulse of the Spirit, (for then only was a woman suffered “to speak in the church,”) prays or prophesies...

I Corinthians 14:33-5 Let your women be silent in the churches - Unless they are under an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit. *For*, in other cases, *it is not permitted them to speak* - By way of teaching in public assemblies. *But to be in subjection* - To the man, whose proper office it is to lead and to instruct the congregation.

Church (1949) has a long chapter on female preachers among the early Wesleyans, and writes:

At first John Wesley gave a rather vague approval to short exhortations, but he recoiled from the idea of women actually preaching. Circumstances and his own common sense made him much more tolerant on the whole matter in his later years, and for some time after his death Methodism had a number of women local preachers.

However, as Bebbington (1989:26) says, the Wesleyans “effectively prohibited female preaching for the sake of impropriety” in 1803. Conference resolved (Minutes:187) that ‘in general’ women should not preach, giving as one reason that “a vast majority of our people are opposed to it.” But if it was convinced that anyone had an extra-ordinary call she might be allowed to “address her *own* sex, and *those only*.” Even then it was only after official permission had been granted within their own circuit, or by written invitation from the superintendent of another circuit, plus commendation from their own. This hesitant, changeable attitude on the part of Wesley, followed by the later Conference, made female preaching a characteristic mainly of PMism and the Bible Christians.

Female Preachers: Hampshire

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to discover how many female itinerant preachers were stationed nationwide in the circuits, as some preachers’ Christian names are not given, only their initials, but Graham (1993) quotes Wesley Swift’s comment in the WHS’s *Proceedings* xxix:79-83 that “We have been able to identify more than forty women itinerants, but the full total must be considerably more.” Graham (1993:81) claims to have discovered 90.

Vickers (1987:252) lists fifteen female preachers stationed in the Shefford/Newbury, Mitcheldever, and Andover circuits in the period 1832-49. His list is incomplete, for it omits Elizabeth Smith if no-one else. Graham (1989) mentions Jane Aycliffe (Mitcheldever, 1837), Mary Bugden (Mitcheldever, 1843), Ann Godwin (Andover 1839-41, Mitcheldever 1842), Dorothy Green (Andover, 1841-3), Ann Haynes (Mitcheldever, 1835), and Sophia Willis (Andover, 1845-7).

The Mitcheldever Circuit committee agreed in June 1835 to “employ Mary Thatcher as a hired local preacher.” In July 1839 the same committee agreed to “employ Sister Mary Knight from the Andover Circuit, as an hired local preacher untill Quarter Day.” Their quarterly meeting of December 1838 agreed that “Mary Minchen go up on Full Plan.” The March 1842 Mitcheldever quarterly meeting agreed to make Sherfield Green into a branch of the circuit, and to appoint “J. Butcher and Sister Price” to serve there. Sarah Price was a travelling preacher, stationed in Andover 1837-8 and Mitcheldever 1841. She was one of the preachers at the opening of the chapel at Swampton in 1838²⁰⁷ and preached on the Sunday and Monday when the Newbury chapel was opened in 1837.²⁰⁸ The Mitcheldever quarterly meeting of June 1844 agreed that “Mrs Diddams go on the plan by herself.”

Martha Ann Green, a local preacher in the Mitcheldever Circuit, was born in 1825 and converted in October 1838, aged 13. She came on to the Plan in March 1841, at the age of 15. Her obituary (Magazine 1843:81-3) records that “Often did she visit her closet to pour out her soul before God in prayer for herself, her friends, the church, and the world. ... In prayer meetings she wrestled with God like one who knew the import of that scripture, ‘the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.’ ... She attended her appointments punctually, not allowing herself to be deterred by a stormy day, a little bodily indisposition, or other equally frivolous causes.” She seems remarkably young for a local preacher, but the 1841 population census for Ovington (near Winchester) confirms the presence of a Martha Green, aged 15, living with her parents George and Sarah. Illness took her, and she died in May 1842.

Hannah Ford (Magazine 1843:163-5) was the wife of W. Ford of Silchester. Born in 1808, she was converted in 1834 or 1835 at a PM watchnight service at Soke, and became a local preacher, “but afflictions and family engagements prevented her from discharging the duties of her office for some time before her death.” She died aged 32 in 1841 after a painful and protracted affliction.

207 Magazine (1839:373)

208 Magazine (1838:257)

Andover Circuit supplies relevant minutes from its quarterly meetings:

September, 1837: That Sister Mary [illegible] go on full Plan

March, 1840: That Mrs Young go on full Plan.

It was not always easy for them. They risked arousing the same hostility as their male colleagues. On the other hand, female preaching could seem such an innovation that people were drawn to hear for this reason. Ride commented²⁰⁹ concerning Elizabeth Smith that “the novelty of female preaching drew numbers to hear.”

PMs: Feminist Forerunners?

In their early days, the PMs encouraged both local and itinerant female preachers, but as the denomination evolved, local preaching by women continued to be encouraged, but their itinerant ministry was discontinued.

Graham (1993) employs such phrases as “male-dominated society and religion”, “equal status with men”, “double standards”, “male chauvinism”, “relegate the women”, “middle-class values”. She writes towards the end of the article, “To sum up, it seems evident that ... the chief prejudice, as the nineteenth century progressed was against women engaging in itinerant preaching. ... It was 1974 before Methodism accepted women into the ranks of the itinerancy.” Note the word “prejudice.” In *Workaday Preachers*²¹⁰ Graham claims: “The Bible Christian experience reflects closely that of the Primitive Methodists. Both connexions were prepared to make use of all means available to spread their message and to recognise women as equal workers with men.”

Some of Graham’s phrases are embedded in interrogative sentences, and it is hard to judge whether they are rhetorical questions or genuine inquiries. But not all are in question form, and they convey a view that early PMism was a kind of forerunner of late twentieth-century feminism, that the PMs were ahead of their time in commendably granting “equal status” to men and women. Graham (1986) goes on:

The Victorian ideal of womanhood was beginning to make itself felt - that a woman’s place was in the home, caring for her husband and family, that her power and influence was to be

209 Magazine (1832:266)

210 Milburn, Geoffrey, Batty, Margaret (eds) (1995) (Peterborough, UK: Methodist Publishing House)

exercised quietly, but nevertheless firmly behind the scenes rather than in the full glare of publicity. These standards were, of course, essentially middle-class, ... the Connexion was, albeit unconsciously, allowing middle-class influences to permeate its thinking.

This is somewhat ambiguous. It is questionable that the notion that “a woman’s place was in the home, caring for her husband and family” is characteristically Victorian, for it seems more widespread than Victorian England in both time and geography. Likewise, Graham’s use of “middle-class” is ambiguous: is she referring only to the Victorian middle-class? or to English middle-class culture more generally? Furthermore, it would seem from Valenze (1985) that the dominance of this notion within working-class life was one of the very factors which provided a receptive context for PMism to take root.

Morris (1967:15) writes that female preaching was “an important and remarkable characteristic of early Primitive Methodism” adding the opinion that “Primitive Methodism struck a blow for their emancipation.” He is fond of the word *emancipation* when referring to PM women not only in preaching but “in social dealings of all kinds”. He writes (pages 197, 203) that “the churches followed the general pattern of society in nineteenth century England in denying emancipation to women. Primitive Methodism was an exception,” and he develops this further with: “the denomination in its turn played a not unimportant part in the story of the emancipation of women,” repeating it almost verbatim on pages 377-8 where PMism “played a real part in the effective emancipation of women. ... the emancipation of women in the Church must also in various ways have helped to create female freedom in other walks of life.” Morris is writing of early female preaching, but the concept of emancipation is one transplanted from a later period of social and political development and applied retrospectively.

Valenze (1985:111, 139) wrote that female preachers “challenged the authority and power of local elites. ... Their ministry was one of many strategies aimed at overturning the status quo,” and adds that “female preachers were active rebels; they spoke for a rural underclass ... when they brazenly attacked the establishment, in all its forms of authority.” It may well be that female preaching had the effect of a challenge to the *status quo*, but the research for this thesis has found no evidence to support Valenze’s implication that female preachers were motivated by any other concern than to preach redemption to men and women who, they believed, were at risk of everlasting ruin.

Not equal

Hatcher (1993:292), analysing Graham's thesis, points out that Graham uncovered only one instance of a female presiding at the Lord's Table, namely in Shefford in 1835. Female ministers were more poorly paid than male (Small Minutes, 1824); they did not enjoy an equal right to speak at quarterly meetings (Large Minutes, 1824), nor to superintend a circuit. Swift (*Proceedings xxix*) adds further details:

- In 1836 it was decided that the preachers' Fund should no longer be open for the admission of female preachers; this was ratified in the rules of 1841.
- Swift discovered no trace of a woman achieving connexional office.
- Female itinerant preachers were not members of the circuit quarter-day board, unless they were co-opted amongst "such other persons as the meeting may think proper".
- The 1822 Minutes stipulate that they were not allowed to vote at quarter-day meetings.

Graham is clearly inaccurate concerning equality, in view of these restrictions. Moreover, she appears to contradict herself. She writes (1986:184-5) about "influences which made Bourne ready to accept women as colleagues on equal terms with men" and about PMs as "a denomination which made no distinction, particularly in its early days, between men and women," but she also concedes that

the women did not have true equality with the men. They were expected to do the same, but to a large extent they were regarded as 'second class citizens'. Although the Conference regulations stated that the sacrament should be administered by those 'whom the meeting shall appoint' in fact I have found only one instance of a woman celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion and none of Baptism. ... So it would appear that, in spite of Primitive Methodism expecting its female itinerants to fulfil all the day to day tasks of the itinerancy, it was not prepared to accord to them full status and equality with the men.

The self-contradictory terms in which Graham writes are also embedded in this paragraph from her Conclusion:

The interesting overall impression, therefore, is that Primitive Methodism was consistent in its attitude to women in the church. From the beginning it had been recognised that they could be chosen by God equally with men to work in and for his Kingdom. This attitude never

fundamentally changed - they held to the principle, even if the actual practice was honoured more in the breach as time passed.

Swift comments: “They had their day and ceased to be,” explaining that their place among the preachers was subsidiary, and had been allowed because of Hugh Bourne’s double conviction that there was no scriptural objection and that they had the necessary gifts and graces for evangelistic work.

Exegetical

PMs claim to derive their beliefs from the New Testament and Wesley, both of which distinguish between two kinds of public speaking: prophecy, which both allow for women; and authoritative teaching in the gathered church, which both forbid. Wesley regards prophecy as utterances given unprepared under the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God. This thesis accepts that understanding of prophecy.

Neither the Bible nor Wesley speaks in these passages of a third kind of public speaking, namely addressing an audience of unbelievers with a view to their conversion; that is, evangelistic preaching. In the pristine, expansionist period of PMism, women engaged widely, both locally and itinerantly, in evangelistic preaching, and neither the scriptures nor Wesley forbid this.

The Magazine (1821:180-1) has a long article “On the Ministry of Women”, based on Wesleyan minister Adam Clarke’s Commentary on Acts 2:16-18. It argues that “the word *prophecy* signifies to teach and proclaim the great truths of God; especially those which concerned redemption by Jesus Christ.” Referring to Romans 16:12, it asserts that Tryphena and Tryphosa were two holy women who, it seems, were assistants to the apostle Paul in his work, probably by exhorting, visiting the sick, etc.: the words “it seems” and “probably” are notable. Persis, it continues, was another woman who, “it seems”, excelled in the preaching. From these premises the article argues that “we learn from this that Christian *women*, as well as *men*, laboured in the ministry of the word. ... Many have spent much useless labour, in endeavouring to prove that these women did not *preach*.” The article fails to establish that these three women did in fact preach, for the verb in each case (κοπιᾶω) means nothing more than to engage in tiring work²¹¹. The article continues its argument that prophecy is preaching, which it also fails to demonstrate exegetically.

211 It can also mean to grow weary, but this is not germane to the discussion.

The PM defence of female preaching is seen in Elizabeth Smith's encounter with an Anglican clergyman who challenged her right to preach on the ground of her gender. She does not argue for the permissibility of female evangelistic preaching, but (like Wesley) gives thought only to prophecy and to teaching the church. Her Journal for 1832 (Russell (2005:216)) records her preaching at North Waltham:

But after I had concluded, a young gentleman of the clerical order, and intimate friend of the church minister's, endeavoured for three hours to discourage me. I told him I had neither inclination nor ability to cavil. ... He replied, "Where have you a positive command to preach? there are several that forbid you, and those scriptures you quote, allude to prophesying and not teaching." I asked him to tell me what prophesying was. He answered, "Not teaching" ... he read 1 Cor. xiv ... which reads thus, "But he that prophesieth speaketh to men to edification, exhortation, and comfort." This scripture ended the debate. And I told him his objections had rather encouraged me than otherwise.

Smith's reasoning requires that words of edification, exhortation and comfort may always be viewed as preaching, no different from (in Wesley's words) an immediate or extraordinary impulse of the Spirit. She thus equated preaching with prophesying, which is permitted for women by both scripture and Wesley; but the Anglican draws a distinction between prophesying and teaching, which both scripture and Wesley forbid. It may be presumed that Smith does not record the Anglican's arguments in full, but from what she does impart, it may be gathered that they were based upon the very Bible which the PMs claimed to follow.

Miss Smith's understanding of her ministry was in accordance with PM policy and teaching, but she does not succeed in refuting the Anglican's argument by exegetically equating prophesying with teaching a church, nor in equating her preaching with Wesley's acceptance of female prophesying but not teaching. The argument may be expressed like this:

1. direct inspiration/prophecy	Bible & Wesley	yes	PMs	yes
2. evangelistic speaking	Bible & Wesley	silent	PMs	yes
3. teaching a church	Bible & Wesley	no	PMs	"= 1"

The argument is not whether the women should or should not preach in church, but that PM praxis contained an unresolved contradiction with the sources they claimed for their religion. A similar inconsistency was noted in section 7B on Legalism.

Cultural and practical

The discord between early and later PM practice in regard to female travelling preachers may have arisen partly from the changing nature of the ministry. In the early, evangelistic days, there were no established churches, and no connexional chapels for them to assemble in, which later lent a sense of ecclesiastical formality to their gatherings. The scriptures nowhere forbid a woman to address unconverted hearers with evangelistic intent: they forbid teaching an established church of mixed gender. Graham (1993:82) explains: “In view of the missionary nature of Primitive Methodism, it is interesting to note that anyone possessing any speaking ability was soon pressed into service first as a local preacher and then as an itinerant.”

A further inconsistency developed within the denomination, for either women may preach in church, or they may not. A cleavage in policy developed towards the end of the period of this study and on into the future, for a case cannot be sustained for allowing women to preach locally, but not to travel as preachers. They should do both, or neither.

The number of female itinerants peaked in 1834 at 26, and then declined till in 1850 only Elizabeth Bultitude remained, who retired in 1862. Swift adds that the preachers' Christian names were given in the annual list in the Minutes of 1844, but there was no woman among them, concluding that the final woman must have been accepted before that date. The reasons for encouraging their local, and discontinuing their itinerant, preaching must lie elsewhere than in exegesis and theology, namely, in practical and cultural reasons deriving from the changing situation as the Victorian era evolved. The PMs never resolved the theological inconsistency, but the following practical and cultural prompts are suggested by Graham:

- The Connexion would be more acceptable in society if it were seen to be more orthodox and respectable.
- Women were usually less well educated than men, and by mid-century desire was strengthening for a more educated ministry. Ministerial training, begun in 1865 and followed in 1868 by the opening of a theological college, was set in a society which did not consider the education of women as of great value.
- Family responsibilities created difficulties in the training or stationing of married female preachers, whereas a man's wife would go with him wherever he might be stationed.
- Chapel building and maintenance required expertise in interacting with builders and other professionals.

- As chapel life became regularised, there was ample opportunity for women to exercise their gifts and calling as local preachers, class leaders, Sunday school teachers, sick visitors, evangelists.

In the early expansionist period, female preaching was used because it was successful. It worked - or, as the PMs saw it, God honoured it. As Graham (1993:91) writes: "Early Primitive Methodism was essentially a missionary movement These early missionaries used all available means to attract attention and to pull in the crowds, especially ... the novelty of women preachers." This is clearly argued by Elizabeth Smith in her Journal quoted above. As noted earlier, John Ride commented concerning her that "the novelty of female preaching drew numbers to hear." Watts (1995:149, 611) comments that PMs "had no scruples about using so proven a means of saving souls" and that the rise of respectability from mid-century was "accompanied by the neglect of many other means by which Nonconformity had attracted working-class people in the earlier, less inhibited years" such as "those female preachers who had held such an attraction for male audiences." Calder writes, "it is clear that the publicity value of using women was not lost on the leadership" (Chapter 4:83). Hatcher (1993:176, 490-1) comments: "There can be little doubt that their male companions saw them as a factor aiding expansion, providing due deference was given to the fact that Primitive Methodism itself was still a male dominated society... In the context of revival, it has been observed that there is a probable correlation between the use of female itinerants and successful membership recruitment." Truss (Chapter 3.2) writes that "The fact that Clowes was accompanied by a female itinerant, Elizabeth Brown, was, in itself, something of a sensation and was bound to attract a crowd."

In the later period, the ministry became male for reasons suggested by Graham. Milburn (2002:15) argues that many early meetings took place in the open-air, houses and barns, hence in an informal setting. There were few chapels and pulpits. As time went by, he argues that it "was one thing to employ women preachers within a revivalistic and rapidly expanding movement, quite another to have women as circuit ministers, occupying manses, and serving a church which was steadily becoming more settled and institutional". It was a practicality for the denomination to adapt more closely to the ambient culture by adopting greater contemporary respectability.

Conclusion

This research therefore suggests two ways in which admiring comment on female preaching needs adjustment. They concern inconsistency and feminism. McLeod (1996:162) expresses similar conclusions. He argues that evangelical movements of plebeian character were less susceptible to considerations of respectability than denominations of higher social composition, and that their heavily evangelistic orientation encouraged a pragmatic approach to the winning of converts. In the first half of the century, PMs needed as many preachers as could be mobilised, and many women's preaching frequently resulted in conversions, which in turn was interpreted as God's approval. Consequently, "objections by scriptural literalists were therefore irrelevant." Although the PMs claimed the Bible as their ultimate authority, "in this instance they pointed to the many biblical passages, including some from the Pauline epistles, which seemed to suggest a more active religious role for women, and they concluded that Paul's prohibition only applied to the particular circumstances in Corinth."

This chapter argues, first, that the early PMs used female preachers because the practice succeeded, and that it is anachronistic to claim them as forerunners of 20th-century feminism. Movements for the emancipation of women did not get under way till the 1860s. It is not easy to perceive the PMs of the 1830s and earlier as somehow sensing that such a trend would emerge, and intentionally or unintentionally anticipating it. They were men and women of their time. The many limitations and inequalities placed upon female itinerants support this the conclusion.

Secondly, as the hagiography which was exemplified in the section on Legalism needed to be balanced by acknowledgement of the inconsistency within the movement between the Bible it professed to derive its religion from, and the practice it promoted, so this section argues that a similar fault-line ran through the theory and practice of female preaching. Their practice was inconsistent both with a literal application of scripture, and with Wesley, whose primitive religion they professed to recover.

D: SOCIALISM

This section will show that the portrayal of the early PMs as working-class political activists is false. In its re-evaluation of the claim of political agitation among PMs, it examines the evidence and concludes that in the area covered by this dissertation, political activity and motivation were absent. In reaching this conclusion, it is at odds with scholars for whom an important feature of early PMism is involvement in Trade Unionism or political activism. The refutation will discredit media as widely different as Davies (1963) and BBC Television, who have recreated the PMs in the image to which they would have wished them to conform. This section shows that they stood apart from political activism and devoted themselves to Wesley's injunction, that they had nothing to do but save souls: or, in Hobsbawm's expression, were "eternity-obsessed". It is erroneous to admire them as activist forerunners of Socialism.

The erroneous Portrayal

Davies (1963:153-4) asserts that:

Primitive Methodists were active in the Trades Unions almost from the moment in 1825 when it became legal ... and they were active, almost, as Primitive Methodists. ... Primitive Methodist preachers were taking the lead in these activities up and down the country, ... They themselves were mine-workers, mill-workers, agricultural workers.

Davies goes on to say that specially intensive PM activity took place in the Durham coalfields and agricultural trade unions, but concedes that agricultural trade unions "began to emerge" in the 1870s. His argument is muddled. Davies et al (1978:163) are equally misleading. Their chapter, by T. E. Jessop, on "The Mid-Nineteenth-Century Background", immediately after reference to the Tolpuddle Martyrs of 1834, says, "It is well known that the Primitive Methodist Church in particular produced political radicals, though the Conference and officers steadily refrained from adopting any one political attitude." Aside from the NE miners, who are discussed below, this involved a leap of some 40 years, which the text hides.

Cracknell (1998:72-3) ascribes "the eagerness with which Methodists have embraced ... 'liberation theology'" to John and Charles Wesley's writings. Yet the proportion of early Hampshire PM leaders

who began their childhood or their Evangelical experience among the Wesleyans makes it dubious that they unanimously failed to import political activism into the new Connexion, if it truly was an integral component of genuine Methodism.

Knighton in Madden (ed.) (2003:10) writes that “Some Methodists of all bodies were involved in social protest, particularly in Luddism and Chartism, and political activities.” He adds that James Etchells expelled people prominent in Chartism from membership in the Crickhowell Circuit, and explains, “The Methodist leadership tended to be conservative but some of the members were radical, inspired by a biblical understanding of and search for social righteousness.” Etchells was a Wesleyan minister, and although Knighton does not say Etchells was Primitive, the name comes immediately after the sentence which states “Chartists borrowed from Methodism class meetings, camp meetings and hymns,” where reference to camp meetings creates an impression that Etchells was Primitive, strengthened by the statement that “especially Primitives” were political activists. Thus Knighton, seeing radicalism as “biblical understanding”, may be added to those who write admiringly, but misleadingly, of early PMs.

Clough (2004:41, 47) argues as follows:

The social and political action of the [Methodist] Church has clearly been an important part of its life, with a strong relationship to the beliefs of Methodists. ... Recognizing the ongoing commitment of Methodists to social and political action begins to point to how the Church understands its nature and mission. ... Alongside evangelism, the commitment of the Church to ‘spread scriptural holiness through the land’ continues to include working to improve the economic and social conditions of those in need, through direct intervention and campaigning for political change.

Clough traces the source of this activism to Wesley’s Arminian theology: “These theological doctrines have a direct impact on the way the Church engages with the world. ... the Church has a responsibility to be active in doing all it can for those outside the Church” (page 46). In the context of his argument, he perceives Methodism as having an intrinsically political dimension.

With regard to the PMs generally, however, political activism appears much later than the cut-off point for this dissertation, emerging in the incipient trade unionism of the 1870s. Young and Ashton wrote in *British social Work in the nineteenth Century*²¹² that Primitive Methodism “was closely connected with agitation for better conditions for the workers.” They mention only the Durham

212 1956:35 London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul

miners. The website myprimitivemethodists.org.uk, under the title *What is Primitive Methodism?*, states that “The conviction that God’s love was for all, led to a concern for social justice, and many Primitive Methodists became involved in politics, as trade unionist leaders, Chartists, and later as Labour MPs,” which reinforces the impression that early PMism was political, and masks the fact that decades passed before it became generally true of many PMs. The popular image of PMs as politically active from their early days was a prominent motif in BBC television’s *Songs of Praise* on 13th January 2013²¹³.

It will now be shown to be erroneous. Political activism was a later development, it might be said, mutation, not a feature of the original movement.

Methodism not political

Inquiry concerning whether biblical and 18th century teachings necessarily lead to an ontologically politicised Methodism lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. Although radical campaigning was absent from early PMism, perhaps it might be posited that their desire to do good and improve the world led to the later activism, as Sangster (1947:56) writes: “The essential democracy latent in the timeless Gospel Wesley brought was mightier far than his personal prejudices through which he was on occasion merely a son of his own class and age.” Thompson (n.d.:9) agrees, with specific reference to PMism:

Our fathers were not political, they had no Social Service Unions (or ideas), but they prepared the way for the social and political reform that came after by the straightforwardness with which they spoke to the individual conscience and to the slumbering manhood of their fellows.

However, it must be noted that the argument of such scholars as Cracknell, Knighton and Clough is not common to all scholars. As Sangster (1947:52) concedes:

John Wesley was a Tory and his immense influence over the Methodist people made them profoundly conservative, too. He believed in the king and the unreformed constitution. Though he makes occasional critical comments on the social conditions of his times, and his passion

213 Nagra, T. (Executive Producer) (2013, January 13) *Old Church, New Church* [Television broadcast] London: BBC

to help the poor ill-assorted with his Toryism, it did not lead him to challenge, even in thought, the settled order of things.

Royle (1987:301) explains:

Wesley himself was a Hanoverian Tory ... Politically, if not theologically, he was a quietist and he urged his followers to concentrate on winning souls; the oppressed were assured the comforts of salvation in the next world, ... it was no part of Wesley's theology to encourage social mobility or political aspirations among the poor.

Likewise Turner (1985:126):

Wesley's conservatism which so deeply influenced Methodism remained as a backcloth to Wesleyan thought well into the nineteenth century. ... The 'no politics' rule was not so much a rigid adherence to a status quo ... but a statement of the view that Wesleyanism was basically a religious not a political society.

Watts (1995:352, 376) writes:

At the root of the political quietism of so many Methodists lay the Evangelical conviction that political activity was an irrelevance which could distract them from their chief purpose of saving souls. ... This is not because one cannot point to individual Methodists who rejected the conservatism of the Wesleyan leadership and embraced radical politics, but because such people were an unrepresentative minority.

Hobsbawm (1957) writes of Wesley and the early Methodist leaders: "They were extreme conservatives in politics, ... Hence it is a mistake to argue that the modern labour and trade union movement derives its inspiration from Wesley. He would have been shocked by it." It must however be noted that Hobsbawm's conclusion fails to take into account Wesley's opposition to slavery.

Moore (1974:3, 11, 12, 26, 223) writes:

Modern Methodist historians ... have attempted to show that Methodism had a positive and 'good' role in the development of modern working-class movements...

By the 1890s the Primitive Methodists were emphasising the importance of workers' organising against capitalists.

There is evident agreement in the analyses of Thompson and Wearmouth that Methodism was apolitical and anti-radical.

Three lines of argument will be developed. Firstly, that the beliefs of Methodists did not specifically entail a social outlook which included notions of class interest and conflict. This sustains the contention that 'churches do not as a rule accept the validity of the struggle between employer and employee.' Methodist beliefs were more congruent with a view of society divided into the saved and the unsaved, in which ethical issues were more important than economic or political issues.

Methodism was concerned with a new man, not a new society, and offered personal ethics not a political programme.

Economic circumstances became more pressing than basic religious ethics in the later period of overt economic conflict and traditional Methodist ideas were no longer appropriate to the actual social and economic situation.

Halévy's theory, in Volume 1 of his *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*²¹⁴ (which describes England in 1815), is often brought to bear on the relation between Methodism and political revolution. He asks on pages 424-5, "Why was it that of all the countries of Europe England has been the most free from revolution, violent crises, and sudden changes?" He argues that Methodist emphasis on the individual turned people's minds away from concerted political activism towards the opportunities presented by a sense of self-worth, thrift, sobriety, and work, thus tending towards social stability.

PMism not political

The founders of Primitive Methodism regarded radicalism with as much suspicion as any Wesleyan (Watts (1995:406)). The supposed link between PMism and political activism cannot be verified; indeed, it did not exist. Hobsbawm and Rudé (1969:288-90) explain:

There is no doubt that in some of the areas affected [by the Swing Riots] religious revivalism followed hard upon the heels of riot and defeat. ... It can be traced among the Primitive Methodists in the south. In the area, familiar to the reader, where Hampshire, Berkshire and

214 (1924) London, UK: Benn

Wiltshire meet, the sect had been far from well established before 1830... Yet barely had the Swing rising subsided, when ... the zealous Thomas Russell succeeded in forming at least seven societies.

They write further (pages 65-8, 186-7, 291-5) that “There is no great evidence that the expanding new sects, like Primitive Methodism, were at this stage very politically-minded in the village: their eyes were fixed on another world. ... and the complaints of the upper classes rarely mentioned dissenters... among the causes of the 1830 rising, whereas - for instance - they habitually mentioned beer-houses.” They continue:

There is an obvious correlation between local nonconformist strength and unrest, though it must not be misinterpreted. ... We do not, of course, suggest a causal connection.

...the religious revival of the 1830s was an escape from, rather than a mobilisation for, social agitation. ... the process by which the hell- and eternity-obsessed village Ranters of the 1830s turned into the union militants of the 1870s remains in obscurity.

Had that “process” been a natural development of the ontological nature of Methodism, or of PMism, it is likely that these historians would have perceived it. Hobsbawm (1959:139) says: “It may be noted that the direct connexion between Primitive Methodism and the labour movement was small.” Stephen Leach of Whitchurch wrote on 16th July 1834 to Sir Thomas Baring that, “If the whole of your Tenants’ Servants and Labourers and the Servants and Labourers of every parish in the Kingdom had been Ranters, not a single incendiary fire would have occurred.”

Werner (1984:165-9), who interprets early PMism “in the context of contemporary secular phenomena rather than told from a sectarian point of view,” asserts that “The relationships between Primitive Methodism, revivalism, and political agitation are not easy to determine. ... Outsiders frequently regarded Primitive Methodism as likely to harbor political dissidents. During the post-Waterloo years this perception on the part of Tory magistrates was probably founded less on knowledge of the sect than on distrust of its revival tactics. ... Some contemporaries, however, saw and valued Primitive Methodism as a “taming” influence... In practice the political temper of Ranterism must have depended to a great extent on the predilections of local leaders.”

Vickers (1987:431) states that “An examination of Methodism in the south supports Hobsbawm’s conclusion that Methodism, especially in the southern half of England, was not strong enough to have ‘a major political influence.’” Concerning political radicalism and popular evangelicalism,

Vickers (1987:258) comments: “That the preaching of the ‘Ranters’ was emotionally highly charged ... but that it was politically subversive, except by implication, or, indeed that in the 1830s and 1840s it had any political content, is a very different matter.”

Wearmouth (1937:153, 215) states that “While the Primitive Methodists appeared to be sympathetic to reform in 1821, they never went beyond the bounds of strict neutrality,” and goes on to argue that, “The violence of the riots in 1830 may have been partly due to the absence in the villages of a disciplinary movement like that provided by Methodism. In the counties where Methodism counted a bigger proportion of the population, no disturbances of any note took place.”

Obelkevich (1976:245) writes: “There were no discernible links between Primitive Methodism and politics in south Lindsey,” and Ambler (1989:78) states, “The surviving local minute books of the period up to 1875 show that south Lincolnshire Primitive Methodists seem to have generally kept to this neutral political position at an official level. Moreover, their following among labourers and other groups outside the parliamentary electorate meant that the Primitives were a relatively unimportant group in local politics until the franchise was extended in 1884.” In the Summary of his 1984 thesis, writing of rural protest in the 1830s, Ambler says, “The Primitives, who were establishing their place in the new social order, appear to have had no links with these protesters” and he explains in Chapter 2 that it was in the second half of the century that farm labourers became organised to press for improved working conditions.

Not surprisingly it is possible to find a number of politically active individuals, but as Sheard (1980:808) observes:

One convicted Primitive Methodist Chartist hardly proves that the whole movement was tainted with radicalism. ... One or two Primitive Methodist chapels were used for political meetings - in defiance of the Conference. ... There is comparatively little evidence from Primitive Methodist sources of members in the circuits covering Cheshire or south-east Lancashire taking an active part in trade organisations before 1860 and even after that, the numbers are not startling.

Hatcher (1993:484) writes that “the Hull circuit does not appear to have produced outstanding first generation political leaders.”

The 1819 Conference prohibition on preachers' wearing white hats was imposed because reformers had adopted white hats, as Royle explains²¹⁵:

The white hat was the 'trademark' of the radical Henry 'Orator' Hunt, a leading popular radical of the period who was the principal speaker at St Peter's Field, Manchester, on 16 August 1819 when the 'Peterloo' massacre took place. So in the late teens of the 19th century white hats symbolised parliamentary reformers advocating full democracy. The ban on such hats was in effect a 'no politics' rule.

The PM Conference of 1835 (Minutes:9-10) stipulated "That none of our travelling preachers be allowed to make speeches at political meetings, nor at parliamentary elections. And it is strongly recommended to our local preachers to avoid such things;" and "That none of our chapels and preaching rooms be lent on any account, for either political or religious controversy." This was repeated in the 1849 consolidated minutes. Magazine (1835:200) addresses the same recommendation to "all our Trustees and members".

The early PMs' policy was non-involvement in political activism. Contrary portrayals of the early PMs are erroneous. The Magazine (1834:436-7) commends the example of "a local preacher, who has had success in bringing forward the converting work, when speaking of religious people needlessly involving themselves in politics"; this preacher supplied an account of his experience, when his mind "got into politics", mentioning especially the disestablishment of the State Church, but he realised that "politics would draw my mind from the converting work. So I gave up the politics at once, and have found the benefit of it ever since."

Johnson (1989) wrote:

in a committee meeting in Winster circuit for March 31, 1834, it was resolved that "this meeting cannot consent for the petition to Parliament which Mr. Worsley wishes to be brought into our chapel for signatories, as we do not wish to interfere in political movements, ours being spiritual." Circuit and chapel records extant for the six circuits of the North Midlands were consulted ... Yet with the exception of that one solitary reference, there was no mention of political affairs.

Further proof of the essentially non-political nature of PMism is an observation of Morris (1967:202): "Primitive Methodist women enjoyed such freedom, and exercised such real leadership,

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that it could be expected that they were to be numbered among the suffragettes. But there is no real evidence of this.”

Kendall (2006:338) states: “Primitive Methodism began by being neither avowedly political nor avowedly non-political, but purely evangelistic.” Vickers (1987:248) comments that “whatever might be the case later in the century, the surviving evidence firmly supports the statement of Hobsbawm and Rudé that the Primitive Methodists were not ‘at this stage very politically minded ... their eyes were fixed on another world.’”

In his article in the PM ‘Aldersgate’ Magazine (1900:701-2) entitled “Condition of the agricultural Labourer”, in which he looks back to his time in Andover in the mid 1840s, Rowe continues his description of the condition of agricultural labourers and of the PM ministry among them by adding:

...their ministrations raised them physically, mentally, and spiritually. When they were discontented with their condition and their superiors in social position, it was owing to the influence of their ministers that discontent did not take the form of violent and unlawful outbursts.

Stephen Leach’s letter to Sir Thomas Baring was noted in Chapter 5D, in which he points out to the baronet that PM preaching did not excite disaffection with the government or the legitimate authority of magistrates, or the duties of servants to masters.

Confirmation that PMism was not a politically active movement, but religious, is found in Tiller (2006:88, 98):

Primitive Methodism, coming to Oxfordshire mainly in the 1830s, was part of a wider spiritual and institutional growth in religion, ... to turn to religion was to turn away from political activism.

...of 22 places in Oxfordshire where Swing activity was recorded in 1830-31 only four (Banbury, (Middle) Barton, Ewelme and Wootton) were to have Primitive Methodist societies, suggesting an inverse rather than positive relationship between the two.

Calder (2012) describes PMism as “a movement driven by spiritual rather than temporal priorities.” He argues that “the early movement’s followers were distinguished by revivalistic preference, not socio-economic circumstances or alienation.” Hatcher (1993:484-6) comments that “Bourne’s radicalism was not of this world.”

Wesley charged his preachers: “You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work.” This was the PMs’ ethos in striving to recover primitive Methodism. Whilst it is true that the higher strata of society were haunted, and sometimes driven, by a fear of political radicalism, the fear was unjustified as regards PMism: rather, PMism discouraged political activism and promoted experience of God. Indeed, the persecution they suffered doubtless strengthened their resolve to stand aloof from political activism.

Chartism, 1838-48

Chartism sought, *inter alia*, universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, and voting by ballot, yet “Official Primitive Methodism was no more sympathetic to Chartism than was official Wesleyanism” (Watts (1995:518)). The Reading Circuit resolved at its June 1842 quarterly meeting “That the travelling preachers are requested not to wear Dandy Chartist’s Hats.” This serves as an indicator that the PMs of this area took pains to distance themselves from any appearance of involvement with political activism.

Calder (2012, Chapter 3:66-7) writes:

The movement seen by Wearmouth and others as a cradle of socialism – British-style – was in its first several decades anything but: the 1821 Conference decided, at Bourne’s behest, to expel a ‘speaking radical’, and the apparently surprising failure of the Prims to deliver up any outstanding Chartists of note is not so puzzling when one considers the fate of John Skevington, ... former itinerant ... hounded out of the movement for his Chartist sympathies and denied readmission.

Calder (Chapter 4:91-2) writes: “The movement was never a firm supporter, even if some individuals were.”

Morris (1967:245-6) records the expulsion in the Nottingham Circuit of T. Beedham in 1841 for a number of offences including being “a great Chartist” and explains that the Circuit “clearly seems to have regarded Chartism as an enemy of religion”, which seems to find confirmation from Kendall²¹⁶:

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Leicestershire Chartism had its camp meetings, its hymns, its singing processions, and as our ministers saw their congregations distracted and their young people drawn away, it looked as though the Primitives were going to be outdone and beaten by their own weapons.

Morris goes on to note that there is considerable evidence of close unofficial cooperation between Chartists and PMs, including several local preachers. He points out both that the two movements were predominantly working class, and that Nottinghamshire Chartism was a law-abiding movement. He adds (page 249) that by 1900 the PMs had considerable political knowledge and interest, and gives many pages on their political involvement in the late 19th and the 20th centuries. Regarding trade unionism specifically he gives no dates of involvement before 1863, then 1866 and 1881.

Hempton (1984:211) states that “a few rebellious Wesleyans, ... and considerably more Primitive Methodists, ... played a major role in Chartism in the regions of South Lancashire, the West Riding, the North East, Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire.” It is to be noted that his observation omits Hampshire, where research in contemporary journals, biographies and archives has uncovered no hint of political activism on the part of itinerant or local preachers or members.

Durham 1820s-1840s

What then of the earlier politically active PM miners in the North-East? They have been studied in Colls (1987), who observes (pages 189, 192, 199) that “In the two great unions which led the miners from the 1820s the Primitive Methodist preachers played the leading role”, adding that PMs formed the majority of union officials in the strikes of 1831-2 and 1844, and that there was support for Chartism among the PMs of Thornley. Sheard (1980:819) writes: “The contrasting notion, that the Ranters were the most aggressively radical of the Methodist groups, and that Primitive Methodist chapels were ‘citadels from which attacks were mounted on the social and economic enemy’ may well be valid for north-east England.” Watts (1995:495) writes: “it was in coalmining districts that the connection between trade unionism and Nonconformity - usually Primitive Methodism - was strongest.”

It seems probable that what prompted their activism was not their religion, for otherwise the same religion would have created the same activism elsewhere. A number of unusual factors were at play. In Northumberland 38.6% of PM men were miners; in Durham a third (Watts (1995:324-5)). They

worked in brutal environments, were in continual danger of sudden death, and lived in close-knit, isolated communities. Hobsbawm observed (1959:131) that many early coal-fields were inhabited chiefly by indigenous populations forming tight isolated and remote centres.

As Colls (1987) observes on the outside cover commending the book: “The Northumberland and Durham coalfield was the oldest and most important in the world.” Mundell (1895:11-32) sheds further light on this, stating that the two largest coalfields in England and Wales were centred on South Wales and Newcastle, and export from the Tyne to France began in the reign of Edward II (1307-27). In the seventeenth century, only the north-east coalfield was prospering: “While Newcastle was thus constantly adding to its revenues, the collieries in the west were in anything but a flourishing condition.” Then, in 1812, the worst mining disaster so far occurred at Felling Colliery, near Gateshead, with the loss of 91 lives, and the following year the Society for the Prevention of Accidents in Coal Mines was formed in Bishopwearmouth.

Knight (2008:6) observes that PMism was the strongest denomination in Co Durham in the 1851 religious census, confirmed by Colls (1987:2, 197) who points out that by 1904 the PMs constituted the major denomination in the coalfield, and that the religion enjoyed a trusted relation within the community, with the preachers acting as shepherds not only to teach but also to protect their flock in its troubles.

However, this north-eastern link between early PMism and trade union activism has been described as an enigma and a paradox. Colls writes (page 159) of “the way in which Primitive Methodism related to the Chartist and trade-union ideology”: “Given the fabulous other-worldliness of the Primitives, and given their renunciation of the secular and their distrust of rationalism this must stand for the moment as an enigma,” and adds (page 193): “these men shared platforms with professional radicals ... whose rationalist politics were far removed from the scriptural fundamentalism of the preachers. This is a paradox which needs further explanation.” Pages 196-9 continue the theme of “the paradox of a rationalist politics and a religious representation” and supply examples of men who lost their PM faith through their union involvement.

Trade Unionism, 1870s

It was in the 1870s that the agricultural trade union movement developed, as Ambler (1989:7), Howkins (1985:47), Calder (2012, Chapter 9:268-9), Nigel Scotland (Proceedings of the WHS

#41:2) all confirm. Truss (Chapter 4) comments: “their spiritual health remained good up to about the 1880’s. ... Eventually more secular concerns, associated with the ethics of its cause – Trade Unionism, socialism, voluntarism - overtook Primitive Methodism and its spiritual life slowly died.” Many working-class Methodists of this later period took an active or leading rôle in political activity. What motivated them is not a matter which calls for speculation in this study.

Conclusion

The absence from journals, minute books and circuit reports written in Hampshire accords with the wider non-political nature of early PMism. The north-eastern coalfield presented a unique close-knit community, susceptible to shared tragedy, where PMism enjoyed a trusted position as the dominant denomination, in a society that contained the oldest and for long the country’s only prosperous coal field. It is erroneous to transfer the developments of the 1870s to preceding decades. PMs were hell- and eternity-obsessed village Ranters. PMs among the early Durham miners, embedded in the ambient culture and prompted by it into political activism, cannot be adduced as evidence of a political character of pure early PMism.

It would lie beyond the parameters of this dissertation to pursue further speculation on the causes of the *sui generis* character of north-eastern PMism, but these factors are offered as pointers for others’ scholarly reflection.

CONCLUSION

This thesis contributes original answers to the two-sided question, *How did Primitive Methodism come to northern Hampshire, and have its admirers and detractors depicted it accurately?* It has demonstrated, from a study of the events, leaders, beliefs and ethos, that the first generation of Primitive Methodists in the four circuits of northern Hampshire do not wholly match the words of their detractors or admirers in both popular and academic writings.

After setting the social, religious, and denominational context, the thesis has constructed a narrative of the years 1830-52, roughly the first generation, and shown that Hampshire PMism remained an integral and homogeneous part of the denomination's ministry, consonant with Shropshire whence it came and the rest of the country, via the national itinerancy of ministers, by links with the denomination's founders, by the annual Conferences, and through denominational publications including the Magazine and hymnbook.

Major characteristics included close relationships; prayer; acceptance and purpose in a dreary, uncertain and sometimes violent ambient society; significant overlap with residual folk religious beliefs; emotionally charged meetings; emphatic warnings of the eternal punishment of those who die in unbelief; legalism; female preachers; temperance; spontaneity and local initiative; opposition; significant activity by the laity; and emphasis on the Bible, the Cross and conversion.

The narrative arising from the original historical research supplies many examples of the seven main features of the movement which have attracted repeated comment from a wide range of popular and academic writers from Victorian times to the present day, and the ensuing chapters analyse and comment on each of those features, beginning with unsympathetic critiques and leading on to admiring commentaries.

Balancing the Obloquy

PMism and folk religion both postulated supernatural intervention in daily life, which helped make PMism attractive to the rural population. The Methodists' belief in providential intervention is

legitimated within their interpretative framework and can be neither discredited nor disproved by humanistic or materialistic discourse.

The emotion aroused in individuals and gatherings lastingly changed many converts from drunkenness, violence or irresponsibility, to sobriety, reliability and kindliness. It was no emotionalism or artificial hysteria.

The emphatic warnings of judgement are seen as wholesome and compassionate when their viewpoint is understood, that men and women are in peril of passing from life into the fires of hell with no possibility of *post mortem* repentance. They deserve no pejorative slur. Furthermore, this preaching is orthodox, being drawn from the Patristic period and documented in English Christianity from the 10th century onwards, not least in primitive Methodism.

Balancing the Hagiography

The pioneers were heroes who attained “astonishing achievements”, but they were subject to human frailty, temptation, mistakes and tragedy; they did not always triumph blamelessly in every snare or difficulty. The character of the movement is thus at variance with some portrayals given by admirers, which need to be tempered by the rectifying of error or imbalance.

Many of the restrictions PMism imposed on members, and occasional attempts to impose them on outsiders, cannot be derived from the *sola scriptura* religion they professed, and contributed to the negative perception of Methodism from the Victorian age to the 21st century.

PM female preaching cannot be eulogised as an anticipation of feminism. Rather, it was a practical use of a means the leaders perceived as honoured by God, and was not exercised in a context of comprehensive equality. It was at variance with the two sources claimed for the religion, namely scripture and Wesley, an inconsistency which remained unresolved as female preaching was discontinued for developing cultural and practical reasons in the itinerancy, but encouraged locally.

Neither was the movement an activist harbinger of Socialism. With the exception of *sui generis* NE miners and some unrepresentative individuals, PMism was not involved in political agitation, although fear of such activism supplied one of the prompts for persecution. Archival material from Hampshire accords with the wider non-political nature of early PMism documented and argued by a range of religious and secular scholars.

Originality and Relevance

The thesis is original in a number of ways. No previous study of PMism in northern Hampshire has been undertaken, and it thus contributes to historical knowledge and is relevant to religious, social and local history.

Other than Johnson (1989), no other doctoral study of early PMism takes an overtly emic approach, seeking to perceive the PMs from their own perspective as a means of penetrating their inner world. In the critical chapters, 6-7C confirm the outward facts observed by writers of a range of genres, but each section argues against their critique, challenging their philosophical grounds (Folk Religion), their understanding of the inner world and motivation (Emotion, Hell, Feminism), or their over-heroic eulogy. The final section, 7D on Socialism, challenges supposed facts frequently adduced by writers who assert that early PMism was politicised.

The thesis contributes a perspective to the ongoing debate about present-day Methodism's relentless decline: are Cracknell (1998) and Dickinson (2012) right in asserting that Methodism will halt its decline only if it moves further from the beliefs and ethos discovered in this thesis, or ought it rather to consider returning to the core beliefs and emphases of primitive Methodism?

Further Research and Debate

The thesis suggests areas for further research.

- This research might be followed by a study of ensuing developments, perhaps 1853-1914 and set in a wider context of denominational evolution, exploring whether the transitions which began in the 1840s, and later changes in theology, practice and ethos, finally engulfed the kind of Methodism originally planted in Hampshire, or whether the movement divided, from the second half of the 19th century, into different streams, perhaps rural and urban, the former maintaining the old spirit and beliefs, the latter mutating into a more decorous, respectable and theologically softened body. This might best be undertaken in a micro-study of one or two circuits, perhaps Basingstoke, and Hurstbourne Tarrant or Silchester, as alone being wholly within northern Hampshire.
- Was the stirring of the 1950s and 1960s an attempt to recapture what had previously been

lost, or was it a late flowering of a religion that had endured in some places for over a century? Such research is urgent, as the last mid-century witnesses are passing away, and a picture of that stirring needs to be built up by interviews with participants, as well as from the archives of such movements as the Methodist Revival Fellowship. Furthermore, if people now in old age listened attentively in their youth to the reminiscences of the elderly, a sufficient range of interviews might enable the construction of a picture of PM life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, due account being taken for the ‘rosy’ nature of reminiscence.

- Shropshire circuits penetrated Denbighshire and Flintshire, but became established only in anglicised areas, despite Welsh-speaking local preachers and a Welsh-language mission, but Wesleyan and Calvinistic Methodism thrive among the Welsh. A thesis awaits its author for an exploration of why an English cultural context was so receptive to PMism, whilst a Welsh context remained resistant.
- A study of PM preaching should be attempted, analogous to Knight (2012) on Anglican village sermons, drawing on published and unpublished records of preaching from around Britain, tracking the development of theology and emphasis until 1932.

However, it is time for this writer to say, with Bishop Wulfsige of Sherborne:

Hoc meum desiderium ad perfectum usque perduxit.

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**APPENDIX: chapels of the period,
illustrating the simple architecture**

Charter Alley, Swampton (photo: *Brinkworth Synod Report 1932*), Silchester, Newnham

